

**An Historical and Critical Examination of the Notion
of Human-Divine Paradox as Typified in Two Images
from Late Quattrocento Italy**

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Introduction

Aim

During the Renaissance there were developments in thought and practice within both artistic and academic fields. These movements, being intertwined with theology, created an exciting context for the re-interpretation of such concepts as the Trinity, Christ's humanity, and the limits of representation. The aim of this thesis is to analyse two images which illustrate these rationalizations of the Doctrine of the Trinity and particularly the human-divine paradox, at the height of Renaissance ingenuity.

This thesis will explore the interaction between the historical, theological, cultural and philosophical frameworks as they influence the composition of High Renaissance art. Conversely, this investigation will examine how these disciplines' are fuelled by the artworks themselves. Within this artistic development of the Trinity, the most startling evolution is found in the interplay between humanity and divinity as seen in the three persons of the Trinity. This paradox provides valuable information concerning the bias of the artist and of the period. However, it also raises questions concerning the extent of theological orthodoxy, liturgical integrity, and symbolic accuracy which need to be addressed by the observer. It is in considering these questions that I hope to be able to express some of the factors which were important to the theological world of the 15th century and which are still important to 21st century understanding of the nature of the Trinity.

Method

Since this project is essentially transdisciplinary it is necessary to create a concise frame of reference from which to investigate. To do this there was chosen a small selection of images so that the examination could be focused on specific stylistic and contextual factors. In devising which images to choose it was necessary to select those which are representative of the general artistic themes of the period. However, it was also important to pick images which re-imagined these conventional themes in new ways. In this period there were vast numbers of images which were produced in accordance with a traditional scheme e.g. in 'baptism' pieces the position of the Father, Holy Spirit, and the Son are top, middle, and bottom, respectively. However, the most common artworks tended to show the traditional perspective and not one which engaged with the contemporary theology, culture or art. As such it was important to select images which show an engagement with the issues. This means that the art has been selected from the more famous artists since they show the most engagement and freedom in the detail of their art while maintaining thematic guidelines.

The themes in which the Trinity prominently appears can be crudely categorised into five sections: Baptism, Epiphany, Crucifixion, Annunciation and Coronation.

Unfortunately, in a thesis of this size there is not enough space to examine each category. So, in recognising that Baptisms and Coronations are the most prevalent depictions of this period the two selected pieces contain these two themes. It was also thought that in identifying two different pieces to study, rather than two pieces from the same category, there might be some revelation of all the categories. This is possible because the categories are essentially differing settings for the Trinity to

appear and as such they have shared characteristics especially where there is a depiction of Mary. The pieces selected are Carlo Crivelli's *Coronation* (1493) and Giovanni Bellini's *Baptism* (1500). In addition to the reasons above these pictures have been decided upon because:

1. They represent the work of two competing artists of comparable skill
2. The artists each worked within the Republic of Venice though there is a significant difference of area since Crivelli worked mainly in Padua and Bellini in Venice.
3. Both show an advanced form of the high renaissance style but contain some elements of mannerism, illustrating the shift in style.
4. These two images both exhibit elements of received style and act as influencing works for other artists.
5. They lend themselves to a discussion of the human-divine paradox (cont. below)

These two images are significant in a discussion of the human-divine paradox in Renaissance art for five reasons. Firstly they both show a human Father. An issue of Renaissance art was the depiction of the Father and how far his divinity could be maintained. These pictures are interesting because they express the Father in heaven with angels whereas many others of the period forgo an attempt at maintaining this issue so visually. For example, a more human expression of the Father figure can be found in Masaccio's *Trinity* (1427) conversely a divine symbol of the Father is painted in Andrea Del Verrocchio's *Baptism* (1468). The style that both Bellini and Crivelli employ, for the Father, is much more typical of the Mannerist period – though to varying degrees do they maintain the paradox. Secondly, the Son is depicted in

different levels of suffering (humanity) and serenity (divinity). This is an important factor because Jesus as the convergent point between the human and divine must be depicted with sensitivity. This sensitivity is also needed for the third reason: the relationships the other figures and details have in the artwork, what do they suggest of Jesus/Trinitarian humanity and divinity? A supplementary idea to this point would concern the relationship that Jesus/Trinity would have on the observer as part of the context of design. The fourth idea concerns the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. In both images the Paraclete though painted as the typical dove symbol is represented differently. For Crivelli the Holy Spirit is small and almost insignificant and for Bellini the Holy Spirit acts as a focal point. The final important idea within the images is the extent to which there are other 'trinities' employed e.g. in Crivelli's Mary, Father, Son imagery.

Purpose

Having looked at the reasons for selecting these images it is clear that each image is extremely rich. This sumptuousness will initially provide the discussion base for analysis of the influences on the creation of the imagery. This discussion will help to form an understanding of the context in which each artist/image approaches the human-divine paradox within a representation of the Trinity. Thus, open a conversation on the human-divine paradox itself which would reveal the limitations of any particular artist's skill in executing an exact reading of theology. This in turn shall enable an exploration of the ideas which are represented in the artworks and how these images portray that which is not easily understood or even recognised in a study of theology.

Outline

The thesis will begin with an introduction to the project. It will present the aim, rationale and significance, and method, and outline of the project. Within the introduction the critical questions will be highlighted for consideration later in the conclusion.

Following the introduction to the project there will be a section on the significant influences on the period of study. It will present the historical, intellectual, and social contributions. The aim is to create a clear (if slightly simplified) understanding of the situation in which Crivelli and Bellini were working. This is especially important for such issues as the political events of the Republic of Venice, the impact of the Black Death, Religious events both in the East and the West, Economic development, Wars between European nations and with the Ottoman Empire, and humanism. All of which contributed tremendously to the artist's creative impetus.

This section will explain some of the terms used in this thesis: human-divine paradox, the theology of suffering, signification, and trinity. This is important because there is a need to understand the presuppositions that a present day reader might have in looking at art and examining these ideas of the fifteenth century. It will be particularly important to define the use of the human-divine paradox as not limited to a purely christological perspective but one which impacts the Trinity both theologically and artistically.

Part 1

The first Part of this thesis will provide a discussion of the first artwork: *The Coronation* by Carlo Crivelli. This will involve initially a discussion of the artist's life, his style and influences, the history of the painting, and a description of the piece. The aim of this section is to prevent eisegesis in the analysis of the image through rigorous demarcation. Following this informative section there will be an investigation within the artwork of the way in which the artist has approached the subject of humanity and materialism. This has been loosely termed 'suffering'. This will begin with the Trinity and work outwards to the others and finally the landscape/backdrop. The next section will describe and analyse the elements of the image which explore through allegory the divine attributes of the figures. This has been loosely termed 'signification'. To conclude this section there will be a discussion of how far each area has prominence.

Part 2

The second part of this thesis will examine the other slightly later piece, Giovanni Bellini's *Baptism*. Following the same pattern as the first part Bellini's history, the artworks history and a description of the piece will be considered. This will be followed by an analysis of the suffering and signification in the image. The second part as with the first will culminate in the conclusions from the images.

Conclusions

To conclude I will look at the development of suffering, signification and thus trinity over my period. To some extent there would be a reiteration of what has gone before

but I shall add to those conclusions by discussing some of the pictures elements in their relation each other and to more modern theology. This might lead to some practical implications for representation and theory of representation.

Appendix 1

This first appendix contains the images which are used or referred to in this essay; principally the two images to which the thesis is devoted.

Appendix 2

The second appendix contains a diagram which shows the connections of different artists to each other. The scope of this runs from roughly 1400 to 1530. This diagram by no means show everybody who was an artist in these times but will express the development of the Renaissance and its change into Mannerism. By doing this it is easier to place Crivelli and Bellini but also to see the influences and their connections as the artistic styles evolve.

General History and Terms

Historical Context

In trying to establish some of the historical influences on the two proposed artists and their communities it is necessary to examine the foundations of the Renaissance. As with all historical periods its inception is ambiguous but it is traditionally thought to begin around the middle of the 14th century. The 'Renaissance' is a 19th century phrase yet the ideas behind the meaning of the word were present in the 14th century. More accurately this period should be thought of as Renaissances because it was not one change but many. The 'first' occurred in Florence where a popular intellectual revival was happening through individuals like Dante and Giotto. Florence was a city with creative genius and wealth far exceeding any other city of that time. However, other factors characterise the shift from the medieval to the Renaissance. One set of commentators condense the factors into three trends. Firstly, there is the late medieval depression of economy and population with the economic recovery in the 15th century. To illustrate the causes of this depression it was common in this period to use the four horsemen of apocalypse (famine, war, pestilence, and death) in art. Each rider was identifiable to those on the eve of the 15th century, especially pestilence in the form of the Black Death which impacted all levels of society. Secondly, there was a rupturing of Christendom brought about by the church which split governance into a multiplicity of geographical areas while seeking unity of faith and rule. Over time this caused there to be many pockets of resistance and self governing. In these pockets, other political and philosophical theories were given liberty. Thirdly, there was the founding of the first European seaborne empires. This caused the world and its commerce to be controlled by Europe through production and trade. Also there were

the first trips to America, exchanges with other countries, and particularly an increase in the trade of intellectual materials.¹

Through trade and training, scholars were rediscovering the works of the ancient Romans and Greeks, not so that they could enlighten theology as the Schoolmen like Aquinas had done with Aristotle, but for their own merit. These works brought about a movement called humanism which sought to revive the thought, practice and belief in humanity which the ancient authors had captured. Between this and the vast novel artistic talent in Florence there was an impact in the Northern areas of Europe particularly the Netherlands.² During the Renaissance these two areas fed each other techniques and style this is especially true of the importation of oil techniques to Italy. For art, the impact of the Renaissance was a new way of thinking about imagery where accuracy and illusionistic representations were of great importance. However, this caused problems within the art world and religious circles due to the delicate balance between painter and patron. For some artists these new developments were viewed as inappropriate. Michelangelo (1475-1564) for example rejected all attempts at illusion and avoided the new techniques with oils in favour of fresco and tempura. Conversely, Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) accepted these things whole heartedly.³ Michelangelo's concerns were partly religious since he believed that trickery was distasteful and unchristian. Unlike today where most artists are not devoted to a religion, in the 15th century most were actively Christian. This caused issues with artists but also meant that the feelings of the church were important in forming opinion. The objections of Savonarola (1452-1498) are a good example. He was

¹ T. A. Brady, H. A. Oberman, J. D. Tracy, eds., *Handbook of European History 1400-1600*, (New York: Brill, 1995). v1. xiv-xxii.

² R. E. Wolf, R. Millen, *Renaissance and Mannerist Art*, (New York/ London: H. N. Abrams, 1968). 2-8.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

steadfastly against the materialism and poor interpretations of the Renaissance church which eventually culminated in his execution for heresy. His comments caused numerous artists to rethink their images most notably the influential artist Fra. Bartolommeo (1472-1517) and in the North of Europe Erasmus (1466-1536) a humanist who supported Luther at the beginning of the Reformation and had great influence in all areas of society.⁴

The Black Death has already been mentioned but war was another continuous factor for the people of the Renaissance. War in this period took many forms. There were the continuing intercontinental wars like the crusades, war between Venice and the Ottoman Empire (1463-79 and 1499-1503); European wars like Charles VII invasion of Italy (1494); war within Italy – Alfonso of Naples, Ferrara, Venice, and Papal nations (1482); news of war like the Ottoman capture of Constantinople (1453), and the 100 Year War (1337-1453); then there were religious wars and fighting like the Hussite War (1420-36) and the Great Western Schism or Papal Schism (1414-1418). From this it is clear to see that all people and areas were affected by these events which would have also left economic issues and famine as fallout from battles.

Patricia Fortini Brown comments on the “otherness of Venice” in comparison with other states in Renaissance Italy. She says this because its continued warring, its acting as a halfway house between Europe and the ottoman Empire for pilgrims and traders, and its ability to conduct business and war meant that it gained a special status in Europe and accumulated wealth. For example, in 1204 the Venetians joined the French crusade but instead of travelling to the Holy Land they sacked Constantinople

⁴ I. Chilvers, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). 31.

and returned with great wealth and artistic artefacts.⁵ Frequent wars, attachment to Byzantine artistry and collaborative working conditions caused the Veneto to be slightly behind Florence in its development. Once the ties of the past were removed the area developed incredibly quickly and began to create its own novel take on culture blending Byzantium with Venetian colourist techniques. By the period studied in this thesis there is also the introduction of oil as a medium for artists and the gradual move towards Mannerism. This shift from the Renaissance through to Mannerism on the eve of the 16th century is very important because it signified the end of the rebellious adolescent renaissance and the growth of the mature subtle and symbolic ability of the Mannerist artist.

The Trinity

The Trinitarian aspect of this thesis is quite complicated since the focus for thinking about it is found in the human-divine paradox. Trinitarianism has well defined rules for the way it is intended to operate. The human-divine paradox also operates under regulation as will be seen later. In a consideration of Orthodoxy in these proposed images it is then necessary to express the rules which govern Trinitarian thought. The primary issue for Trinitarian art is the contravention of Mosaic Law concerning the representation of God and the possible idolatry issuing from that. This was a particularly difficult problem between 325 and 9th century where differing opinions concerning religious art in the church had prevalence at different times. This thesis does not wish to examine the problems with these arguments because as far as the period of study is concerned this debate is not relevant especially when discussing images of Christ. However, it is important to mention the consistently recognised

⁵ P. F. Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*, (New York : Harry N. Abrams, 1997). 9-33.

need to maintain the nature of the Father and the Holy Spirit as mysterious. From the beginning of the Christian faith there have been allegorical representations made of the Father and the Holy Spirit the earliest being those found in the catacombs. These images led to the earliest portrayal of trinity as the three distinct symbols in one place – the hand, the dove and the lamb.⁶ More metaphorical representations allowed for the theme of the three visitors to Abraham to become the prevalent Trinitarian imagery as in early examples such as the 6th century mosaic in the Santa Maria Maggiore in Rome.⁷ The first four councils of the church concretised the nature, and subsequent artistic laws for depictions, of the Trinity. Admittedly most of the positive statements made about Trinity were actually apophatic in style; anathematising heresy while affirming orthodoxy. For example there are images which support Modalism where the trinity is carved from one piece of stone and given three faces or subordinationism which places the three members in hierarchy. Until the Great Schism (1054) the church managed to maintain a semblance of artistic orthodoxy. Post-1054, in the West there was an increase in interpretations of scenes and theologies in art. There were people like Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267 – 1337) and Andrei Rublev (c.1360 - 1427) who were able to revolutionise previously standardised iconography by making small changes to the format.⁸ This along with other factors resulted in the Renaissance religious and artistic pluralism.

Human-Divine Paradox

The human-divine paradox is initially associated with Christology. The nature of Christ ever since the council of Chalcedon in 451 has maintained the dual and equal

⁶ L. Twining, *Christian Symbolism and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art*, (London: John Murray, 1885). 3, 56.

⁷ R. Goffen, ed., *Masterpieces in Western Painting: Masaccio's Trinity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998). 16.

⁸ Chilvers, *Dictionary*, (1990).

“recognised in two natures, without confusion, without change, without division, the distinction of the two natures being in no way annulled by the union.”⁹ For the artist this paradox poses a problem since there is great difficulty mentally apprehending this concept regardless trying to paint such a concept. It is in nature similar to attempts made by modern artists to try and capture the essence of infinity in art.

This concept is not limited to the Son but can be attributable to the other members of the God-head as well. The first hint of this is found in Genesis 1:26 where we are told that humans are “made in the image” of God. Regardless of whether this is a physical image or similarity of characteristics there must be something human about the Godhead. Secondly, 20th Century theologians talk about Christ’s humanity in terms of true humanity – what humanity was intended to be. If this is correct then there must be something of that in the Godhead. Thirdly the language which is used to describe attributes and characteristics of the 1st and 3rd persons of the Trinity are fundamentally human concepts. As far as language is concerned the Father and Holy Spirit are caught within humanity’s categorisation. There is a constant emphasis on the unknowability of God but to suggest that God cannot reveal himself is ludicrous because only the God of the Philosophers remains so detached and transcendent. The Trinitarian God of the Christian religion is fully revealed in the Son and in action in the Old Testament. This creates a paradox between the human interaction verses the Philosophical God. When the metaphors of language are taken a step further into real pictures the paradox becomes stronger. When Moses (Exodus 30:20-3) sees God’s back we cannot tell what that looks like only that there is a form of a back involved. However, when an artist creates the image of the back of God one sees more –

⁹ Chalcedonian definition: Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/chalcedon.html> retrieved 11th July 2009.

clothing, musculature, size, etc. God becomes defined more and loses the philosophical distinction.

The aim of this thesis is not to debate the right or wrong of depiction of the Godhead but to accept that God is depicted and so examine how well the artist remains faithful to the doctrinal imperatives which the church offers. For the purposes of this thesis that means how is the human-divine paradox conceptualised in art. Underpinning questions are: How can the viewer *see* God? What does seeing God actually mean? Does theology break under these conditions? Can the artist ensure theological orthodoxy?

Suffering and signification

Rather than trying to see the paradox as a whole in the pictures, the analysis of each image has been split into two parts loosely termed Suffering and Signification. They correspond to the human and the divine, respectively, in the paradox. The reason for having chosen these terms is that it concentrates the implications of the words human and divine into conceivable ideas rather than the purely abstract concepts.

Suffering is representative of the human condition. Augustine when devising his theory on the fallen-ness of mankind talks about the separation of mankind from God. This concupiscence is an enduring suffering which humans have to undergo during their lives and which ultimately leads to death. In using this in imagery all things which are human in appearance take on something of this idea. Even

anthropomorphised creatures are included in this because they are given a personality which is founded in the fallen-ness of mankind.

The opposite spectrum of this is Signification which is indicative of Divine mystery because it makes use of the world of concepts and Forms. Things with signification point to something other than themselves in the same way that Christ's existence points us to the divine. Art in all forms corresponds to this idea because the creative side of humanity points to the creator who gifts humanity with creativity. Signification, therefore, is an intrinsic part of making and viewing art.

Part 1: Carlo Crivelli (c.1435 – c.1495)



Carlo Crivelli, *Coronation*; Above: *Pieta*, Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan, 1493.

§1 – History and Context

Biography

As with most Renaissance artists there is very little detail about their personal lives and so the academic can only draw conclusions from their artworks. Carlo Crivelli is no exception to this. It is thought that he was born around 1435 and died around 1495. Though his education is not known exactly it is assumed that he learnt in Venice and Padua. Various masters have been attributed to him. Either Jacobello Del Fiore (1370-1439) or Giambono (1400-1462) is thought to be the first teacher when he was a boy. However this is hotly debated and no real consensus has been reached regarding Crivelli's preceptor.¹⁰ As a teenager it is thought that he went to Vivarini's School in Venice where he developed his skill. After he left Venice he went to work with Francesco Squarcione (1397-c. 1468) in Padua where he met and worked with Mantegna (1431-1506) and developed the trademark Paduan style.¹¹ The only dates that are certain are 1457 when he was convicted of adultery and imprisoned for 6 months. Deductions from documents suggest that by this time he was the master of his own workshop. The second certain date, 1468, is the earliest inscribed piece of work which is found on an altarpiece in the church of San Silvestro at Massa Fermana. Following the trial Crivelli went to Zara in Dalmatia (now part of Croatia, but then part of the Veneto). Finally he settled in The Marches of Italy. Though he lived a fairly nomadic lifestyle he considered his home to be Venice. This strong attachment can be seen in every piece of artwork he finished because he signed them all *Crivellus Venetus* (Crivelli the Venetian). Rushforth comments that for a man

¹⁰ J. A. Crowe, G. B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in Northern Italy*, (London: J. Murray, 1912). v1 81; G. MacNeil Rushforth, *Carlo Crivelli*, (London: Adamant Media Corporation, 2005). 2; P. Zampetti, *Carlo Crivelli*, (Firenze: Cassa di Risparmio di Fermo, 1986).

¹¹ For more information on these two characters see section on history of Giovanni Bellini.

working in the Marches of the Veneto the title of *Venetus* “brought with it a prestige and even a commercial value that was not to be despised.”¹² Around 1490, Ferdinand II of Naples rewarded Crivelli’s loyalty towards the anti-papalists in Ascoli by conferring on him the title of *miles* (knight) – “one of the few incidents which break the monotony of the painter’s uneventful career.”¹³ After this event, all of Crivelli’s artworks have the honorific *miles* added to the signature.¹⁴ His last dated work appears in 1493 and which is thought to be the year he died. Certainly after this work there is no more recorded paintings by Crivelli.

Style

Unlike most artists of this period, whose styles developed as they aged, Crivelli’s style was fully formed almost immediately. Furthermore, his method remained virtually unchanged throughout his career, but his emphasis in his compositions altered quite dramatically.¹⁵ Crowe and Cavalcaselle talk passionately about Crivelli’s style and how over time his grotesque figures who often appeared lame became the

most tragic and impassioned representations... attaining a realistic force which is second only to that of Mantegna... on the whole a striking, original genius; unpleasant and now and then grotesque, but never without strength, and always in earnest.¹⁶

Certainly in the *Coronation and Pietà* (1493), which is one of his last works, the contrast between his earlier works is palpable. His development to complex emotions painted through striking colours and soft lines can be

¹² Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 12.

¹³ Crowe, *Painting*, (1912). v1. 92.

¹⁴ Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 21-22.

¹⁵ Ibid., 15.

¹⁶ Crowe, *Painting*, (1912). v1. 84.

clearly appreciated. In fact on this image alone Crowe and Cavalcaselle comment that:

The dead Christ with the Virgin, the Magdalene, and St. John are the very finest of their class amongst the productions of Crivelli, not only in regards distribution and action, but in respect of form and glowing colour. This was the very best... work of a disagreeable but most talented painter¹⁷

Unlike his contemporaries of the late 1400's who were developing techniques with oils Crivelli used only tempura. Apparently his ability was so good that Gordon Rushforth in 1900 notes numerous times the clarity of colour and lack of aging in all of Crivelli's pictures.¹⁸

Commission of the Piece

Documents housed at the Notarial Archives of Fabriano, offers indubitable proof that the altar piece was started on the 9th January 1490 and clarifies that the original piece was to have the Pietá at the top and the Coronation at the bottom.¹⁹ It was commissioned as an altarpiece for the high altar of the church of San Francesco, Fabriano. Crivelli has signed and dated it: Carlo Crivelli, Venetian, Miles, 1493. It is painted using the tempura style and is considered one of his most important works. The church of San Francesco was the second largest in the town of Fabriano built between 1291 and 1398. During the 15th century it was richly decorated by many artists. Crivelli was commissioned for two works; the first is under discussion in this thesis and the other was commissioned for the private chapel of Oradea Becchetti.²⁰ The regulations originally presented to Crivelli by the Franciscans in the contract were few and mainly involved the choices of the Saints to coincide with the bias of

¹⁷ Ibid., v1. 95.

¹⁸ Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 25.

¹⁹ Zampetti, *Crivelli*, (1986). 299.

²⁰ R. W. Lightbown, *Carlo Crivelli*, (New Haven/London: Yale University Press, 2004). 437.

the order. The original commission was for four saints but two were added to the sides later in the project and they cause the curve from the lunette to be slightly misaligned. Due to this change and doubtless many others over the course of the commission, the piece was finished in 1493. It was bought by Pietro Oggioni of Milan who left it to the Pinacoteca di Brera, Milan in 1855.²¹

Description

The *Coronation with Pietá* is a complex image to describe because of the level of detail but also since it is composed of two separate scenes. Therefore, in this discussion they shall be treated separately. The overall shape of the picture is rectangular with a curved apex. In the lunette at the top shows a pietá and in the bottom half can be seen a coronation of the Virgin. For ease of description the pietá will be split into three categories: the setting, Christ, and the Others.

Description: Pietá

The image in the lunette gives the impression of a scene from a balcony. The front of the balcony is inlaid with marble. Upon it, towards the left of the image, is a book on a stand with a candle behind it. In front of the book is an ink well and feather. On the right hand side of the balcony is a pot containing unguent and a smouldering taper. A white cloth drapes over the balcony. In the middle there is a brocade cloth covering the top in an irregular fashion. Like actors in a play, the four characters are set behind the balcony. Behind them are two ornate curtains hanging down - one running along the back in dark brown shades the other down the centre in lighter orange tones. Together they form a cross shaped back drop. The curtains also act to separate the

²¹ Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 108.

major and minor figures in the lunette John and Magdalene on the outside Jesus and Mary on the inside. The scene in the lunette has been described as a pietá, but the image could be easily be mistaken as a deposition rather than a pietá. The correct position for Christ in a pietá ought to be with his head resting upon the lap of the virgin. However, in this image Crivelli has changed the arrangement to give the impression of suffering much more clearly through contorting Christ's body. Christ is held upright by John's left arm and the two patterned tapestries in a cross formation behind encourage the reminiscent impression of a deposition.

The body and face of Christ are made to look old and haggard. The impression is of death is very strong with the visible wounds on his hands and chest. Christ's head lolls backwards to the right and his long brown hair streams downwards with the verdant crown of thorns on his head. Above his head is a golden disc halo with red cruciform bands inside marking it as different from other nimbus in the image. Jesus' right hand is held by John and clearly shows the nail wound. Jesus left hand is held by Mary Magdalene. Christ's hands betray the Paduan style of long fingers and contorted angles. The angle John holds Christ's body helps to reveal the wound in his side. Christ's musculature is painted in a style which shows the torment he had previously undergone. A white loin cloth covers Jesus navel which disappears down below the balcony.

The others in the image are from the left: John, Mary, and Mary Magdalene. There are also two red cherubs hovering above the scene. Mary stands or kneels to the left of Jesus and holds the upper portion of his left arm in her left hand while her right hand is placed upon her chest. The expression on her face is a complex mixture of sorrow

and adoration. She has tears trickling down her face. Her features are elderly and her hair greying. She wears a dark blue, almost black, shawl with gold trim wrapped around her head and draping down her shoulders and body with a red tunic. She has a golden halo over her head. John kneels at the right of Jesus with his left shoulder pressing in to Jesus right hand side and his left hand supporting Jesus back. John has young features and long curly hair which is in the style common to young Venetian men of that period. There are tears on John's face. He has a golden halo and is looking at Jesus hand and the nail wound. John wears a yellow toga with a red mantle billowing around his shoulders. The red mantle has a blue reverse side which creates continuity of colour between the three figures. Magdalene holds Christ's left hand in her right and like Mary has her right hand on her chest. She is kneeling and wearing a costume resembling women of the Veneto of the time. It is a red and dark blue ornate dress with puffy brocade sleeves. The Magdalene's face is young and fresh in a pose which is oddly reminiscent of Botticelli's *Birth of Venus* (Fig. 3). Her hair is long, wavy and golden. She has a gold halo. Her eyes look down towards the wound on Christ's hand with a reaction which is different to John's, more revolted.

Description: Coronation

The lower section of the image contains the coronation. It is necessary, because of the intricacy of relationships, to split it into four areas: the setting, the Trinity, Mary and the others. The coronation takes place upon a marble platform. The Platform is adorned with intricate stone work including two large cornucopia horns. Within the curve of the cornucopia there is a moon on the left and a sun on the right. Three individuals flank either side of the platform. The platform is resting upon the heads of four vermillion cherubs. Mary and Christ sit upon a stone bench on the platform.

Behind Mary and Jesus is a crème coloured hanging which is held by two angels and provides a background for Mary and Jesus. Behind that there is a brocaded curtain running from left to right at the same height as the necks of Jesus and Mary. With the two cloth bearing angels there are four others; two on each side. Behind the angels is sky. Under the angels and between the cloths there is a mass of cherubim creating a curve and softening the angularity of the join between the hanging and curtain. The Father leans out of a portal in the universe above the heads of the Virgin and Son. Behind him there are a host of cherubim. In the centre of the triangle composed by the Father, Son and Mary is the Holy Spirit.

The Trinity is arranged with the Father at the top, the dove directly below and Mary and the Son below side by side. The Father is depicted as an elderly man with long grey hair and beard. His skin is tanned. He wears a black cloak with a golden trim and a red garment underneath. He leans out of a portal in the sky to place a crown on the head of the Virgin and of the Son. The Father has a golden halo. The Holy Spirit is depicted as a small dove below the Father's head. The Holy Spirit is bathed in an aureole which radiates from the Father's beard. The dove is outside the portal but slightly higher than the Virgin and Son. From a distance it seems like one wing of the dove touches the hand Jesus is using to crown the Virgin. The Son is seated on the platform next to his mother and has long golden hair and a short beard. His right hand is used to help the Father crown the Virgin. His left hand holds a cross sceptre. He wears a red brocade robe. Upon his head there is a crown and a halo hidden behind.

Mary in this portion of the image is seated at the right hand side of Christ. Unlike the pietá, she is represented as a young woman. She has long brown hair and her head is

tilted down in the direction of Jesus. Her eyes are mostly shut as she receives the crown yet her pupils can just be seen looking down towards the feet of Jesus. Her hands are crossed over her chest. She is wearing a blue brocade robe with a red inlay - the traditional colours for the Virgin.

The others in the coronation image are from the left: St. Venanzo²², John the Baptist, St. Catherine of Alexandria, St. Bonaventure²³, St. Francis, and St. Sebastian.²⁴ In addition to these recognisable figures there appears a host of cherubim and six angels. The cherubim have already been mentioned and need no further description. The six angels are positioned three on either side of the portal to heaven. All of them are wearing tunics with colours: yellow, blue and red, golden, golden, red and blue, and yellow. They are all standing on clouds and using them like shoes in the sky. Each angel is doing something: the first from the left is playing a harp; the next is playing a drum; the two in the middle are holding the back drop for the coronation; the fifth angel is playing a lute; and the last a viol. They all have a hairstyle which is typical of the early 1490's.²⁵ St. Venanzo is the first of the other figures. He is a young man with long brown hair and a long fringe. This is the same popular style as the angels and St. Sebastian. He is wearing a band around his head and a short tunic with red stockings. He is carrying a pennant and is stood behind John the Baptist. John the Baptist has dark skin and an haggard face. He has long dark brown hair and unusually is clean shaven. He is wearing two roughly cut garments in grey and red. His right hand is pointing towards Christ and Mary and his left is holding a scroll and a black

²² It has also been suggested that this is St. Geminianus. Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 108.

²³ It has also been suggested that this is St. George. Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 108. or St. Venantius. Web Gallery of Art <http://www.wga.hu/frames-e.html?/html/c/crivelli/carlo/index.html>, accessed 9th August 2009.

²⁴ Lightbrown, *Crivelli*, (2004). 449-455.

²⁵ S. M. Newton, *The Dress of the Venetians, 1495-1525*, (UK: Scholar Press, 1988). 30-5.

cross staff. The Scroll has “Ecce Agnus Dei” written on it.²⁶ He is facing out towards the viewer but looking up towards Christ. St. Catherine of Alexandria is a mature woman with intricately styled hair and an orange and red dress. She is holding her symbol the wheel. St. Bonaventure is an older man who is wearing the clothes of a Bishop and is looking at a small crucifix. Underneath his bishop’s robe he has the Franciscan habit. St. Francis is easily recognisable in his grey friar’s habit and tonsure. He is looking towards the scene with a adoring expression on his face. His hands are together in a prayerful position which helpfully shows the stigmata on his hand. Behind him stands St. Sebastian. He is recognisable by the arrow he carries in his right hand. In his left he holds a staff. He is wearing similar clothing to St. Venanzo.

History: Pietá

The word *pietá* originally comes from the Latin phrase *imago beatae Virginis de pietáte*. It is used to describe a type of image which shows Christ resting on the lap of the Virgin. Unlike other images which are based on biblical examples this myth came from early 14th Century Germany. It was first invented in the *Buch besonderer Gnaden (Book of Special Grace)* by St. Mechtilde of Hackeborn (1241-89). One Good Friday afternoon the saint found time to meditate on the time between the celebration of the Cross and the Entombment. The subject of his meditation was “the veneration of the redemptive wounds of the dead Christ as he lay in the Mother’s lap.”²⁷ This topic was considered worth of further meditation and so was first sculpted around 1300. The *pietá* does not appear in Italy until the early 1400 and is not a common theme until after Michelangelo’s (1475-1564) *Pietá* (St Peter’s Rome, 1498-9) (Fig.

²⁶ Rushforth, *Crivelli*, (2005). 107.

²⁷ A. N. Didron, *Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, (London: G. Bell, 1886). v1. 179.

4).²⁸ Between its inception and the 16th Century it underwent changes. Mary and Jesus were originally the only characters but later by others like John the Evangelist and Mary Magdalene were added. Mary generally looks at her son but some of the later images show Mary looking at the viewer. Later images do not see Jesus laid in Mary's lap but either laid on the floor or resting against Mary's knee in a seated position.²⁹ Since very little changes beyond 1500 Crivelli's version is a considered a late and developed image. In this particular painting Crivelli's style is reminiscent of the deposition. Yet the terminology pietá takes preference because even though there is a cross formation in the curtains at the back of the figures the cross is not actually present. Also, several key figures are missing e.g. Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus. Furthermore, the theme of the whole altarpiece is Mary and so a pietá is much more appropriate than a deposition.³⁰

History: Coronation

The coronation image, like the pietá, is extra biblical and invented during the medieval period. Its history begins with the elevation and cult of the Virgin Mary. This was especially common during the 12th Century where the chivalrous orders popularised the term 'Our Lady' and the "lady of all hearts: whose colours all were proud to wear."³¹ During this time the *L'Incoronata* was used which shows Mary being crowned by Jesus. However, the meaning of those images was to do with the victory of the church and not exultation of Mary specifically. Mary's significance was further increased in the 13th century with the various orders in the church taking Mary

²⁸ I. Chilvers, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). 303.

²⁹ Didron, *Iconography*, (1886). v1. 179-181.

³⁰ Ibid., 164-168.

³¹ A. Jameson, *Legends of the Madonna: As Represented in the Fine Arts*, (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1890). xxvi.

as a main saint e.g. the Franciscans who had enrolled themselves the champions of the Immaculate Conception. During the 14th century Danté's poetry was so popular it led to the titles 'Queen of Heaven' and 'Mystic Rose' being given to Mary. In 1414 the Council of Constance and the condemnation of Huss allowed for more public adoration of the Virgin. Between the council of Constance and this period of study the coronation in particular became a popular theme in art. Unlike the earlier L'Incoronata, the coronation images had many people in attendance. Generally the other members of the Trinity were involved in the coronation. Most importantly L'Incoronata was definitely allegorical, however, at the eve of the 15th century the coronation images were not viewed allegorically but historically. This is an especially important point for modern commentators on these images.³²

³² Ibid., xx-xxx; 13-100; 328-330.

§II – Suffering

Father

Introduction

In this piece by Crivelli, the Father plays a central role in the coronation and yet is clearly absent from the pietá. Crivelli, in this image attempts to keep the Father divine while representing him as human. In the first millennium of the Church's history the depiction of the Father in human form was anathema. However, as has been said, at the point of schism between the Eastern and Western Churches (1054) there were increasingly more images of the Father in Western art. Steven Bigham comments that it is generally accepted that the first extant, direct representation of Trinity (and specifically the Father) is found in the Vatican Library - an early 11th century Greek manuscript containing an illustrated text of *The Heavenly Ladder* of St. John Climacus.³³ The image shows an old man holding a child who is holding a dove. Often when the Father was depicted, post-11th century, he was indistinguishable from a normal human being. However, during the late renaissance there were several attempts to return to the image of the Father as transcendent through more symbolic or metaphorical expressions. Crivelli's aim in this picture is to create a more faithful representation of the events. Involving the Trinity in this composition is important because it alters the coronation and pietá. Lightbrown points out the influence of Franciscan theological scholars on this image and as shall be seen below this causes there to be much more complexity in the image because of the overarching

³³ S. Bigham, *The Image of God the Father in Orthodox Iconography and Other Studies*, (U.S.A.: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1995). 89.

theological regulations.³⁴ Within this section the human attributes of the Father will be considered.

Anthropomorphism

The first concept to be considered is the Father's physical appearance in the coronation. The Father having been given physical shape is granted physical emotion and expression. As he leans forwards through the window in space he looks heavy, bound like the viewer to the laws of a natural universe. The contortion of the arms over the portal does not speak of the usual divine lightness of the Father, but seem to give the impression of muscles and human movement. He has been given dark skin, a beard, long hair, all of which suggest the passing of time on the earth. Traditionally, this was linked symbolically to wisdom. However, in this respect this picture is also presenting a more human representation.

His appearance in the coronation strongly suggests Fatherly blessing on the Son and Mary. There is tenderness in his placing of the crowns on their heads seen in the position of his hands. The image does not seem to portray the almighty but rather a Father who is pleased with those he loves. Even the fingers on the Father's hands portray a gracefulness which is unusual for Crivelli who usually prefers the long bony fingers of the Paduan style. Even the Father's gaze is engaged with the activity of the coronation. In many images, where the Father is depicted, he looks out of the picture into the distance above the head of the viewer which gives the impression of holy purity. However, in this image he is completely focused on the events that are taking

³⁴ Lightbrown, *Crivelli*, (2004). 479-490.

place. In this way Crivelli again makes the Father less mysterious though his involvement with the scene unlike his artistic antecedents.

Absence from the Pietá

In an image where the trinity features prominently, it is surprising that there is no significant representation of the Father in the pietá. There is an allusion to the spiritual importance of the scene by the presence of the two cherubim above the four figures. Equally, the cherubim could merely be a statement about the importance of Christ or an acceptance of the non-historicity. It is possible that the significance is in the Father's absence. Certainly, if the pietá is taken as a deposition, then the gospel narrative emphasises the significance of the Father's absence. Regardless, there is an importance to Crivelli contrasting the Father's presence between the two scenes. Furthermore, the absence from the pietá heightens the feeling of suffering because though Christ is surrounded by people he is alone and separated from the God head. Also, it places the pietá in the realm of human suffering by not emphasising the divine presence.

Jesus

Introduction

This image is quite remarkable in its depiction of the Son because it presents two very stark contrasting representations of him. The pietá shows Christ in death and the coronation shows Christ in victory. The line of geometry connecting the two Christs helps to force a comparison between the two as indeed it does for Mary. The viewer is expected to see and understand the differences between the two and the meaning that

has for each setting. In order to examine these two quite different images of Christ they will be treated separately and then contrasted.

Pietà: Body

The Jesus of the pietá has been drawn in a style which reflects the Paduan school and is reminiscent particularly Crivelli's contemporary, Mantegna.³⁵ Crivelli has imbued Jesus' body with weight. This is not the body of a divine being but the corpse of a human. The way the head falls to the right and the way the arms drape lifelessly all show the great skill of the late renaissance artists and their understanding of anatomy. This quality of draughtsmanship allows the viewer to be able feel the weight of Christ and to an extent the horror of a dead body. Furthermore, accurate development of weight is further heightened by the contorted position of the body which gives the impression of Jesus having just been removed from the cross. Again Crivelli is telling the viewer about what has happened previously i.e. Christ is not simply someone who has died but he has endured great torment and his body has been broken. Furthermore, the Paduan style makes the image even more grotesque by elongating the limbs and fingers, twisting the waist and elongating the neck. Through this technique Crivelli creates a contrast in the Christ figure. The observer can tell that if this body were not broken it would be extremely graceful and so the damage is more shocking. The level of detail in the body of Christ is also worth noting since it is not just musculature but also veins in the limbs and skin folds around the nail and spear wounds. There is a depth to the reality of the physical form of Christ.

³⁵ For more information on this character see Part two, §1 on Giovanni Bellini in this thesis.

Pietá: Injury and Age

It is not only in the way the body is formed that Crivelli gives this impression of pain and suffering but also in the detail of the person of Christ. Both John and the Magdalene are presenting the wounds of Christ's hands to the viewer. A reminder of the suffering Jesus endured on the cross. Also, Jesus face looks haggard he does not look like a man in his early thirties but of much greater age - more comparable to the Virgin. This is an important distinction because often in art the Christ in death looks as pure and peaceful as the Christ in life. Another way by which this is highlighted is in the colour of Jesus skin. In renaissance paintings Jesus is always pale skinned. Yet in the pietá Jesus has a darkened complexion. This might be to reflect the time Jesus spent on the cross with no coverings or it might be to show the reality of the Jesus body from a life of travelling. Again these ideas serve to present Christ as a human with whom the viewer can identify. Usually a pietá is restful and meditative however Crivelli has created a pietá which is shocking in its referral to violence and elicits sorrow rather than contemplation.

Coronation: Age

In contrast to the pietá, Jesus appears in his prime in the coronation. Everything about him suggests perfection and yet he still appears in a very human form. The style is Paduan and so the fingers and limbs appear elongated and awkward. The lines and colours are soft which is much more like the Venetian style. Christ's hands and feet are unnaturally positioned. The halo is all that distinguishes him as divine and that is pushed to the back in favour of the crown. A particularly striking element of this composition is that Jesus shares a resemblance to his mother in his facial features: With long noses, high foreheads, pronounced cheekbones and small mouths. This

does not seem to simply be a sign of holiness as in the icons of earlier periods but a deliberate attempt to represent the familial connection and emphasise Jesus' humanity.

Coronation: Position

Another strong display of his humanity is the relationship he has with his mother. As deity it might be expected that Jesus would be seated higher on the plinth in order to maintain that distinction. However, he is placed almost equal with Mary. An interesting development of the late renaissance was to have images where the coronation happens to both Mary and Jesus. If the crowning of Mary is about the recognition of her special calling as a human into divine service then the equal crowning of Jesus expresses something about the humanity of Christ.

Coronation: Gaze

Sometimes in late Renaissance paintings Jesus acts as the narrator of the scene by looking outwards at the viewer and drawing them into the picture. In this composition by using Jesus as narrator, Crivelli is drawing our attention to the Virgin and her crowning. For the viewer this appears as if Jesus is saying two things: that the promise of future glory can be achieved by humans and that Mary is worthy of adoration because of Jesus authorisation. However, Jesus gaze is not a calm or pleasant one but rather seems to be a stern admonition of the viewer for disbelieving. Again Crivelli uses his skill to express the humanity of Jesus in the facial features which seems to belie the divinity of Christ.

Coronation: Relationships

The two Christ's seem to emphasise different ideas. The Christ of the pietá presents the viewer with a human representation of Jesus while the coronation presents more divine aspects. These ideas will be dealt with later in the thesis. For this section, however, the human elements of the two Christ's must be compared. It is almost as if Crivelli is presenting the humanity of Christ in two ways: the humanity of earth and the humanity of heaven. In the coronation, the biblical ideas of heaven are incorporated into the setting and humanity is shown as God originally intended it to be, without sickness, hunger, etc. As a result, the pietá becomes a reminder of what humanity on earth is like. In doing this the two images then act as a reminder to the viewer of the differences between heaven and earth but also a reminder of the state in which the viewer themselves exists – travelling towards glory.

One feature both parts of the image share is the idea of the cross. In the pietá it is very obvious since the scene is reminiscent of a deposition and the curtains are in a cross shape. However, the coronation also hints at the sacrifice Christ makes. Jesus in the coronation is holding a cross, John the Baptist with a cross staff, and St. Bonaventure is looking at a crucifix. The other saints also indicate to the viewer people who had to carry crosses in their lives. This shall be examined more carefully later.

Holy Spirit

Significance

The Holy Spirit in this image is very unusual. By this time all representations of the Holy Spirit used the symbol of a dove. Only occasionally does the Paraclete appear in any other form. However, this particular dove is remarkable since it is so small. The

emphasis is clearly on the actions of the other two persons of the Trinity. It could even be suggested that the Holy Spirit has been replaced as a member of the Trinity by the Virgin. This is certainly a possibility since Crivelli's later artworks place the importance on human figures and when the Holy Spirit appears it is in a diminished form e.g. the *Annunciation* (1486) (Fig. 5). The use of the dove though not conforming to normal discussions on suffering or humanity does portray physical expression in its symbolism. Just by using a dove as the primary image for the Holy Spirit signifies a move which makes the Holy Spirit a part of our world rather than the metaphysical world. Though this symbol is one which is acknowledged in the bible, the being of God is still limited by an incarnate form. In this sense there is an element of suffering imposed upon the Holy Spirit in as much as in the humanness imposed upon the Father. However, this is diminished slightly through the unnatural appearance of the dove as will be mentioned later in the thesis. Another factor is the Holy Spirit absence from the pietá and, as with the Father, the Holy Spirit's appearance in the coronation heightens the subtext of suffering and separation of Christ in the world.

Others

Mary

In looking at the category of others in the image the first that should be discussed is Mary in both of her settings. The pietá version shows Mary as an old woman looking at her son who has died. The coronation shows Mary as she was probably when the annunciation took place; that is to say as a young woman. As a whole the artwork is focused on her yet her involvement in the scenes does not cause her to stand out but instead helps to present the action of Christ. The coronation in this format is an

analogous, adult version of the Madonna and child images because of the positions of Christ and Mary on a platform. With this in mind the two images represent both the birth and death of Christ. Mary's ages between the two parts of the picture suggests passing of time which makes the reality of Jesus life more apparent. Furthermore, each Mary adds emotion to each of the images. In the pietá it is grief, in the coronation, submission. As expressed in the introduction, the *L'Incoronatio* format proffers Mary as a symbol for the Church. As an ecclesial symbol she is used as a role model through her actions: involved with and grieving over the death of Christ and as submissive to the will of the Father through the Son.

Saints

John and the Magdalene in the pietá help to reveal the suffering of the Christ figure in the image. They make the viewer remember that Jesus was a real person who built friendships with men and women. Their main role is to help the viewer mediate on the wounds which Christ sustained on the cross. Their actions and expressions teach the viewer the correct way to respond to Christ. They also help by showing Jesus as a real man like John and of the race of the Magdalene. This comparison is useful because the representation of Jesus and Mary in the coronation exhibit facial features which in their perfection are slightly nonhuman. This is needed because the other saints, unlike John and Magdalene, are unattractive. By painting others in a 'real' setting like the pietá Crivelli is able to make sure that the Jesus of the Coronation maintains a human visage.

In the coronation it is plain to see that the participants are focused wholly on the events which are taking place. This devotion by the Saints and angels to the activities

of the Trinity is what makes the Christ-narrator so expressive. It seems to suggest that the only person worthy to comment here is Christ himself. In each Saint, some element of sacrifice can be seen. St. Catherine is carrying her wheel, St. Bonaventure is devoted to worship, St. Stephen with his arrows, St. Venanzo with his warriors banner, John the Baptist who appears grotesque because of his life in the desert, and St. Francis wearing a habit and with the stigmata clearly on his hands. In this way the concept of sacrifice as a subtext is presented very strongly within the coronation image. All of this adds to the depth of meaning in the Trinity and their sacrifice through Christ.

Environment

As a final note to this section of the thesis there are small elements within the image which contribute to the human-divine paradox in the Trinity which need to be addressed. The bible and candle in the pietá are representative of Christ and speak to the viewer concerning Christ as a light and Christ as the Word. These two ideas are important because they point to the realities of the life of Christ and his example. The angels as with the Father and the Spirit have been given human image. However, unlike most artists who paint angels as nondescript gender Crivelli has given them a distinct appearance because their hair styles represent the favoured cut of the young men of the time. Although combined with the Venetian dresses the angels can be seen as neither male nor female. Despite this they are participating in the world and so are privy to the emotion of the events. As has been mentioned the curtains at the back are in a cruciform shape and help the viewer to remember the underlying narrative. The unguent jar and smoking taper are symbolic of Mary Magdalene's visit to the tomb and remind the viewer of the death and burial of Christ.

§III – Signification

Father

Introduction and Anthropomorphism

As has already been mentioned, the Father in this image is given a human appearance and human attributes. However, this is not the limit to Crivelli's depiction of the Father; he is much more imaginatively conceived. Furthermore, the humanity which has been given to the Father is not compatible with his surroundings. The first problem which might trouble the viewer is that the Father is visible. Certainly this is a problem for modern day critics. However, those of the renaissance would be comfortable with the Father represented as a man having seen him in many images prior to this one. The issue here is that the Father is not standing as a complete person with the Son and Mary in the crowning but instead is a half revealed deity appearing through a tear in the fabric of the universe. This technique used by Crivelli maintains the divine aspect of the Father which many of the other artists of the late Renaissance had foregone in favour of more anatomical representations e.g. Niccolo di Pietro's *Coronation with the Donor and his Family* (Grottaferrata, 1394) (Fig. 6). This reminder of the divinity of God is not as basic as the usual symbolism which might see the Father carrying a globe or as a pair of disembodied hands³⁶ e.g. Christoforo Caselli da Parma's *Madonna with Hilary, Baptist, and the Eternal Choir of Angels* (Parma, 1499) (Fig. 7). It suggests a more complex concept where divinity is emphasised by action and merely symbolically. For example, it is obvious that the figure crowning the Son and Mary is God the Father because there is a portal through

³⁶ L. Twining, *Christian Symbolism and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art*, (London: John Murray, 1885). 84.

which he reaches. This is something that no human despite their appearance could achieve. Furthermore, the crowning of the Son also indicates a divine privilege.

To the viewers of the image in the 15th century even the hair of the Father would render him instantly recognisable. The symbol of the elderly man has from the earliest images of the human Father been the distinguishing factor from the son and the Holy Spirit. In one illustration from a manuscript of the 15th century which represents Trinity as three interlocking men on a bench the Father is identifiable by his old age characterised by the long beard.³⁷ The clothes the Father is wearing do not contain religious symbolism but they do point to the importance of the figure wearing them. Though they are not brocaded like the garments of Mary and the Son they are made from a heavy and valuable material, possibly velvet.

The Father in this image seems to be totally intent upon the action of crowning Jesus and Mary and yet there is no indication that this is a celebration or that he is pleased. The Father in this regard is impassive towards his environment. This is appropriate for the Father because it reasserts divine impassibility on the human form. By removing expression, the Father retains some of his mystery. Furthermore, it is worth noticing that the face of the Father, which the Old Testament informs us would cause death (Exodus 33:20), is not pointed directly outwards. Instead we see the Father from a skewed angle much like Jason looking at Medusa through his burnished shield. This causes the Father to appear less definable and so more divine.

³⁷ Ibid., 86.

Christ

Pietà: Halo

As in the last discussion of Christ the two parts of the image shall be considered separately. The Christ of the pietá has hardly any features which give the viewer the impression of his divinity, only the halo is worth mentioning. It is a solid disc in the Byzantine style rather than the band which was favoured in the late Renaissance.

Within are the two crossed red lines which signify the redemption through the cross.³⁸

This detail identifies Jesus as distinct from all others in the painting. Any other assertions concerning his divinity are inferred mainly from the other participants in the image as will be mentioned later. The halo in the pietá is much more prominent than the one in the coronation. As in the pietá, the Jesus in the coronation has a cruciform halo.

Coronation: Physicality

The Christ of the coronation is much more divine in appearance than in the pietá. Crivelli's emphasis is on the perfections of heaven and the otherworldly scene of the coronation. As such, Christ, despite having the characteristic Paduan elongations, is exceedingly graceful in his posture. His hair falls in a pleasing way and he is dressed in the finest clothes the Venetian world would know. The clothes he is wearing are particularly significant since it is similar to the apparel for princes. Jesus complexion and features add to this idea of perfection by being painted with clean lines, dignified form and light colours. This is heightened by the contrast between Jesus and the others in the image that will be examined later.

³⁸ G. Fergusson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, (UK: Oxford university Press, 1961). 149.

Coronation: Gaze

In the last section it was said how the gaze of Jesus acts as narrator for the image. This position is unusual for main figures within any picture since they ought to be completely absorbed in the activity which is taking place. However, here the authority of Christ is being exhibited. It is his right to commend the viewer to honour his mother. This again illustrates the divine quality of Christ. Also by giving Jesus a three quarters profile Crivelli presents Jesus as present within his own narration. Instead of simply pointing to Mary it is as if Jesus is pointing to both Mary and himself. This is important because Jesus narration shows his own importance and divinity within the picture. Because of Jesus station it is permissible for him to narrate in this way.

Coronation: Crowning

Another way in which Jesus exhibits his own divinity is by joining the Father in the coronation of the Virgin. In most coronation images where the trinity is present only the Father crowns. However, Crivelli in presenting unity within the Trinity portrays the Son crowning the Virgin too. Not only is Jesus placing the crown but his hand is reminiscent of the gesture of blessing. Both these things suggest the divine nature of Christ in the image.

Comparison

Again it is worth mentioning that both of the Christ figures are meant to be contrasted by the viewer. Through this comparison there is a very strong complementarity in the image where the divinity of the coronation helps to reinforce the humanity of the pietá and vice versa. In both images there is a sense that Crivelli wanted to convey the victorious Christ. In the pietá, Christ in death is victorious over death and sin. In the

coronation, Christ, having conquered death is crowning his Mother and including her in the victory. This is further expressed by the contrast in crowns. In the pietá Jesus is wearing a crown of thorns but in the coronation that has been replaced with a royal crown. In this way the pietá becomes an important part of the coronation image qualifying some of the symbolism in order that it might be interpreted much more easily. Without the contrast of crowns the significance of the Jesus' royal crown would not be so apparent. Another contrast is found in the wounds of Christ which are visible in the pietá but unusually have been missed from the coronation. This is quite a problem because all images of Christ post-crucifixion tend to show the scars of crucifixion clearly. In the coronation there are no wounds present on the hands of Christ. This could indicate that Crivelli wanted to show the perfection of the setting and of Christ in heaven or it could indicate that the coronation is taking place at some time prior to the crucifixion. The only indication of wounds is a very small aureole at the place where the spear pierced Jesus' side which corresponds with the pietá side piercing.

Holy Spirit

Size and Aureole

The most striking aspect of Crivelli's depiction of the Holy Spirit is how insignificant it seems. It is unclear whether this is because Crivelli has theological issues with the Holy Spirit or if it was simply the only size which would fit neatly within the triangle of the Father, Son, and Mary. It does create an issue within an image which displays the Trinity and one must ask if Mary has in fact displaced the Holy Spirit. However in an image which was commissioned by Franciscans that seems unlikely. Furthermore though the Holy Spirit has diminished size it is still acting as a focal point for the

image and as the centre of the triangle. The aureole around the Holy Spirit reminds the viewer of its importance and highlights the dove's divine nature.

Non Anatomical

Crivelli's style is to make everything in the image appear realistic but the lack of realism in the composition of the dove is quite striking. The Holy Spirit is not gliding down but almost looks as if it has been pinned on like an R.A.F. badge. Also, the body and wings do not give the impression of being drawn by a master because they lack subtlety and draughtsmanship. Conversely, this could be intentional since it ensures that the viewer does not think the dove is a real dove by keeping it much more symbolic than accurate.

Crowning

Another interesting detail is that the Holy Spirit seems to be crowning the Virgin along with the other members of the Trinity. This is important because it maintains the unity of the Trinity and also reinforces the idea that the dove is divine. However, as you can see from the detailed image in the appendix the dove is not actually touching the finger of Christ. The distance which can clearly be seen prevents the idea of the dove's involvement from being fully acceptable. There is enough evidence in the optical illusion to not discount this interpretation.

Others

Pietá: Mary, John, and Magdalene

In the pietá all three figures serve the same function. Their role is to meditate on the wounds of Christ and to present him as worthy of adoration. In this way Christ is seen

as divine by the viewer of the image. By including the Virgin we are reminded of how she is Jesus' Mother but the expression she has on her face is not that of a mother, but of a follower. The expressions of the Magdalene and John also do not simply express mourners. Though there are tears and the participants are clearly crying, it is restrained. Crivelli in his *Pietà* (San Pietro di Muralto, 1488) (Fig. 8) paints grief much more obviously than in this *pietà*. In this image he is not presenting grief but adoration and meditation. By doing this the *pietà* is much more didactic and theological than purely concerned with expressing human relationships and the suffering of Christ.

Coronation: Mary

The Virgin is the subject of the painting and yet she withdraws from the focus. The submissive pose of the Virgin in the coronation helps to point to the trinity as the important and divine element in the image. This is appropriate to her character but also in expressing the importance of the Trinity; nothing should be more important in the image than God. Mary herself appears much younger than in the *pietà* which illustrates the divine situation of the coronation and shows the unhistorical nature of the image.

Angels

The angels in the image are important in establishing the two parts of the picture as connected within the mystical story of Christ and Mary. The two cherubs in the *pietà* are symbolic for the host of heaven joining in with the meditation of Christ. This creates a pleasing contrast with the coronation which is mythically supposed to happen after the assumption of the Virgin. So we see Jesus in heaven celebrating with

the angels playing music at the top, the hosts behind the curtain, and the others supporting the base of the throne. All of these angels contribute to the divine setting in which we find the Trinity.

Coronation: Saints

It is not necessary to explain in great detail all the attributes of the Saints presented within the coronation because they have a common reason for their attendance on the scene. The first reason is to bear witness to the act of coronation. This is partly to grant the viewer a sense of the importance and validity of the coronation but also conversely to recognise certain saints as being important to the local community e.g. St. Venanzo who was a patron of the town. The relative position of the Saints to those being crowned helps to establish the importance of the central figures. The second role they have is to teach the viewer what focused adoration looks like and who is worthy of it. The third role is to remind the observer that following Christ involves sacrifice. These two are important because they help to lead the observer into the image so that they too can participate in the scene and worship.

Environment

Theme of Trinity in Shapes

Though Crivelli is not seen as a good draughtsman there is a significant role in his image for the geometric.³⁹ Everything within the construction of this painting seems to be pointing to Trinitarianism. In the pietá, the four figures are arranged in the shape of a triangle. With the two cherubim there is a downwards triangle through Christ and the Virgin. Also there are various unequal triangles between the hands of Christ,

³⁹ Crowe, *Paintings*, (1914). 84.

Christ head and each of the figures. In the coronation there are three angels either side of the portal. Three figures either side of the platform. A large triangle between God the Father and SS. John the Baptist and Francis. The significance of this is that even though this is an image of the coronation and of the pietá the emphasis is being placed on the Trinitarian nature of the painting.

Allegorical Objects

Despite the fact that the pietá seems to be the more 'realistic' of the two parts of this picture it is full of allegorical imagery which take the human back into the divine. As with most symbols in Renaissance imagery they are generally ambiguous in their intent and so vary in their meaning between commentators. The candle and bible with inkwell on the left belong with John and the unguent jar, burning taper and white cloth belong with Mary Magdalene. Certainly this would make sense since John in his gospel talks about Christ in terms of the light and the word and Mary Magdalene is the first to discover Jesus empty tomb with the clothes folded neatly when she went to pour perfume on his corpse. However, they could equally mean different things it is certain that they are meant to represent foreshadowing and thus there is maintenance of the divine and symbolic even in an image which suggests strongly the humanity of Christ.

Architecture

There are other indicators of divinity present in the background beyond the bible and candle. The curtains in the shape of the cross help the viewer to remember the process that Jesus had to go through to complete his mission. They also draw the eye inwards to the figures Crivelli wants to highlight. In the coronation there is also a second

meaning in the curtains because they act to separate the firmament from the earth. This helps to distinguish the Father as divine and the Son as both divine and human. On the platform itself can be seen the Sun and the Moon which were often taken to be symbols for the Virgin.⁴⁰ However, they can also be representative of the Son because he is called the 'alpha and omega' which has links to the Sun and Moon. Under this are two cornucopias which symbolise the providence of God but they are also suggestive of the altar in the temple.

Time

A last idea which is intrinsic to the image though not explicitly present is the conflict in times. When are these scenes happening? The easy answer might be that they occur at different times. The pietá is much earlier than the coronation in the mythological chronology. It is also inappropriate to imagine that both scenes are happening at the same moment. The Virgin's mission is completed in its entirety at the cross. It could then be conceived that Mary receives her crown at this point. Alternatively it could be thought that the coronation takes place at the annunciation and these images are the beginning and end of Mary's story and the life of Christ. Unfortunately such comments are largely speculative yet the ambiguity does provide one certainty that the scenes express something of the timelessness of God. The whole painting speaks of God's action in the world and the viewer does not need to see them chronologically, in the same way that God does not see them chronologically.

⁴⁰ Ferguson, *Symbols*, (1961). 45.

§IV – Conclusion

Father

In discussing the human-divine paradox in relation to the Father, the most important area for consideration is how Crivelli has tried to reconcile the Father's divinity with his human appearance. The anthropomorphic interpretation of the Father is a problem since it limits the Father to human perceptions. In the image, God the Father must be wearing clothes and look elderly, he must be anatomically correct according to the human form, he must take part in the scene. Even though Crivelli has done these things they pale into insignificance because the presentation of the Father is much more divine than human. Within Crivelli's image the humanity of the Father is symbolic rather than literal. Crivelli's Father is half revealed and so has a great sense of mystery and ambiguity. He is reaching through a portal in the universe which is clearly a metaphor for the unknowable nature of the Father because the scene of the coronation is already in a pseudo-heaven world yet even here the Father is not fully manifested. The hair and clothes are less descriptive and more symbolic in their presentation as well; the clothing symbolising importance and the hair wisdom and authority. However, the choice by Crivelli to use contemporary dress for the Father does suggest a Father limited by time because the Father is responding to the fashion of late Renaissance Veneto. The emphasis on divinity is continued in the pietá because of the absence of the Father and contrasting presence in the coronation. Within the discussion of the human-divine paradox the Father in this image is much more divine than human despite the human appearance.

Son

Unlike the Father, the Son appears much more human than divine in this image. The pietá particularly expresses the humanity of Christ. It is impossible to deny that Crivelli wanted Jesus in the pietá to appear human. Jesus is shown with musculature, veins, weight, contortion, expression, and injury. The only suggestion of the divinity of Christ is the halo and since all the others have halos, only the cruciform halo shows the significance of Jesus. The coronation on the other hand attempts to portray Jesus as more divine by having him narrate the story, participate in the crowning of Mary, possess grace and perfection in pose, and have a nimbus on the wound. Despite this, apart from presupposition, there is nothing that particularly marks Christ as divine. He could easily just be a special human. This is especially problematic since in the coronation image Jesus is made to appear equal with Mary through their respective positions in the piece and thus human. Also each image shows a different emphasis on the victory of Christ yet victory is the important element and acts as a divinising property. Another divine indicator in the coronation is the lack of visible wounds, Jesus being made younger and the resurrection of Jesus from death. However, as has already been mentioned rather than thinking of the two images as representing Jesus as human (pietá) and divine (coronation) it is probably better to consider him as embodying the humanity of earth and the humanity of heaven respectively. Crivelli does not effectively present the divinity of Jesus. This is at odds with the human-divine paradox.

Holy Spirit

As with the Father the Holy Spirit in Crivelli's image has a symbolic rather than a physical body. The dove symbol is widely recognised and accepted as the appropriate image for the Holy Spirit. Yet there are problems with using this metaphor because it limits the divine side of the Holy Spirit. This would be more true if Crivelli had used an anatomically correct image of a dove however, his painting is more symbolic in form. There is an issue with the size of the dove and its significance within the Trinity but the aureole helps the viewer to see this symbol as divine. Furthermore, the slight appearance of participation in the Trinity is effective in presenting the Holy Spirit as divinity. Overall it seems that Crivelli is confused about the nature of the Holy Spirit. He understands its importance to the Trinity but does not allow it space to be as significant in his composition as the act of crowning the Virgin. The dove is then a symbol of a divine being and yet is limited by the artist's misconceptions about the nature of that divinity which is why the dove seems slightly misplaced.

Others

The Others in the image achieve different emphasis in the different sections. Beginning with the pietá the actors in the scene add a sense of grief and physicality to the setting which heightens the human dimension of the Son's involvement with them. However, their emotions are not necessarily for the death of a friend or a son but for a leader and their saviour. Within the meditative pose Crivelli has given them the divine attributes of the Son are eluded to. However, the pietá is a very human situation, much more so than the coronation which tries to provide a divine contrast to the pietá. This can easily be seen in the differences between the Mary of the pietá and the Mary of the coronation. The difference in age, submissiveness and setting give the

impression that the Virgin is in a holy setting in the coronation which adds to the divinity of the Trinity. The Saints in the coronation also add to this concept of divinity by showing adoration for the central figures. However, within their presence is a continual reminder of the human drama of sacrifice found in the Christian life exhibited in Christ primarily and later in each of the saints. All of this is offset by the continued use of angels which appear playing in the sky, under the throne, behind the curtain, and in the portal. This reminds the viewer that the scene is one of divine power. The Others in the picture grant the setting a certain otherworldliness and divinity that is needed in the pietá, and is heightened in the coronation.

Environment

The symbols in the background play a considerable part in developing subtle themes in the image. The concept of Trinity is increased by the use of groupings of three throughout the picture. This helps the viewer to see the image as ruled by a natural governing power stemming from the Trinity. There is an emphasis on other parts of the Christ story in symbolic form. The bible, candle, unguent, and cross curtains all act as reminders for the suffering and realism of the life of Christ. The architecture in the image implies the divine nature of Christ. The Sun and Moon and the cornucopia add to these metaphors and the divinity of Christ. Furthermore, the question concerning the temporality of the events is interesting since it develops the heavenly and divinity orientated nature of the images. All these ideas contribute to a greater picture than the one which is being examined, namely the person of Christ. The overarching emphasis in these symbols seems to be aimed more at the divinity of Christ than the humanity.

Trinity

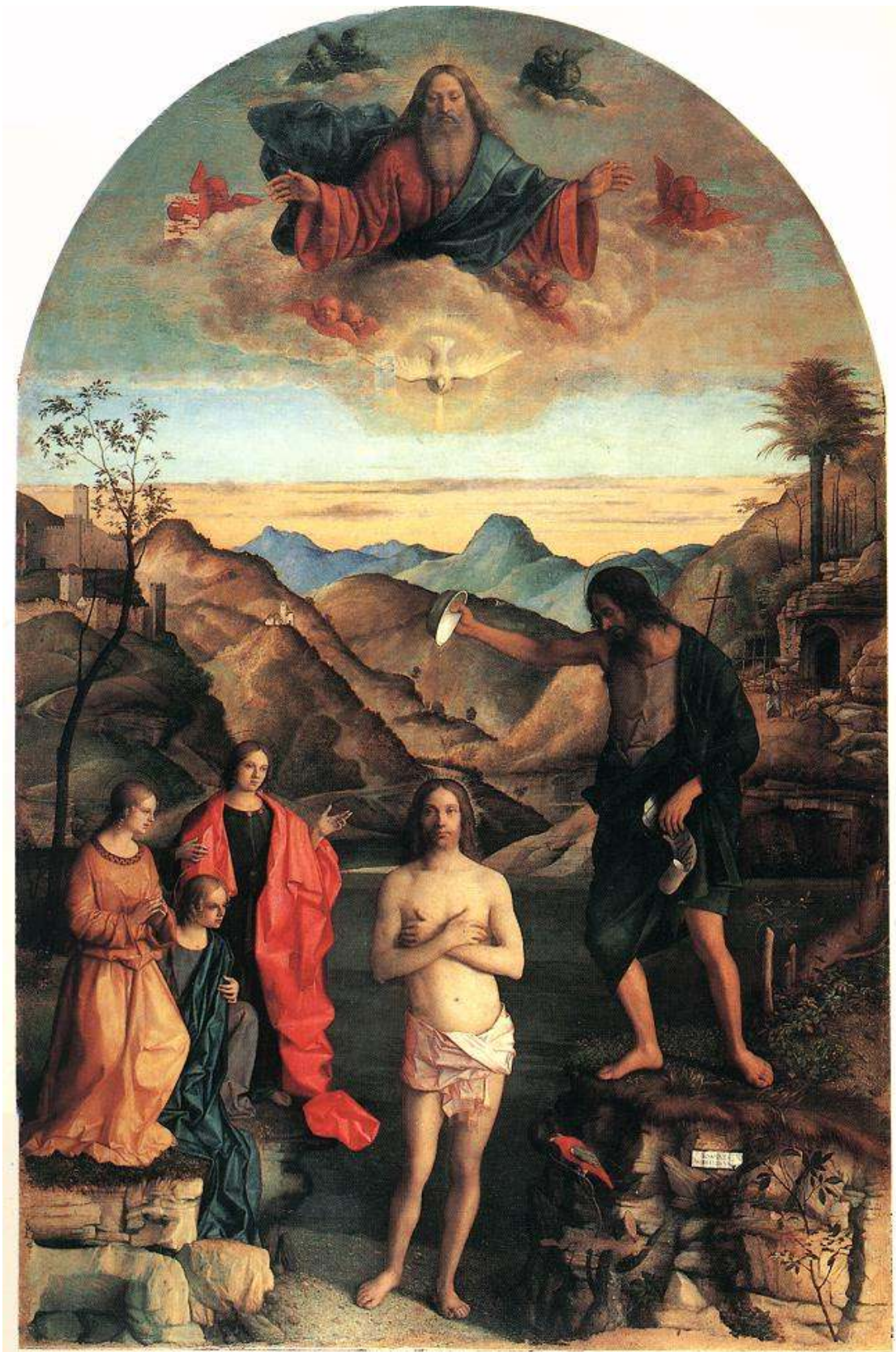
In examining the Trinity within this image there are a few doctrinal problems which come to light almost instantaneously. The most important of these is the effective replacement of the Holy Spirit by the Virgin in the coronation. This creates a very unusual format for presenting the Trinity because the normal equilateral triangle which is often used for the Trinity is squashed to the right hand side of the image to incorporate the Virgin. This also creates a problem of subordination since the Holy Spirit is reduced to less importance than the Virgin or Christ. This, along with the size of the Holy Spirit is important since these images were part of the didactic material for those who could not read. Another area where subordinationism is present is by the Father crowning the Son as well as Mary though this problem is lessened by Jesus involvement in the crowning of Mary the issue is still there and must be taken seriously. The pietá causes problems for the concept of the Trinity as well because there is an artificial separation of the Son from the Trinity especially considering the number of references in the pietá to the deposition of Christ. A major complaint concerning this image is the fact that there is no real unifying factor present. Though the Father and the Son are crowning the Virgin, the Holy Spirit is effectively excluded. Apart from this there is no suggestion of unitary existence.

Human-Divine Paradox

In this picture by Carlo Crivelli there is a definite attempt to maintain both the human and the divine within the Trinity. It must be remembered in the analysis of this image that the focus is Mary, and so concepts like Trinity become secondary to Crivelli. This causes problems within the image because as far as the doctrine of the church is concerned the orthodoxy of Trinity and the use of the human-divine paradox should

be more important than Mariology. This having been said, Crivelli does try to maintain theology as best as possible. His study of the Son is particularly fine. By making the Son in the pietá exceptionally human he addresses many of the undercurrents of the story of Christ which are lost in other art by trying to make one image of the Son appear both man and God. In the same way, by emphasising the divine aspects in the coronation this dual imagery is completed. However, that assumes the two parts of the image are viewed and understood together by the observer. Using a divide to explore visually the human-divine paradox in Christ causes another problem because the human aspect does not fully take part in the Trinitarian. The emphasis on Christ in heaven loses the human and becomes divine while the Christ on earth is human with no significant divinity. In this way there is an element of 'separation' which the Chalcedon definition stands firmly against. In dealing with the other two members of the Trinity Crivelli does not achieve a paradoxical equilibrium but emphasises the divine nature of both the Father and the Holy Spirit. This is a good bias but the physical manifestations still detract from the divine unknowability. The Others in the image and the background all intentionally contribute to the divine nature of the Trinity rather than the human. What they contribute often addresses the humanity of Christ and their presence helps the viewer to identify better with the scene and to better understand what their commitment to Christ in the world means. Overall the emphasis in this artwork is the divine over the human yet the pietá helps considerably in rectifying this bias.

Part 2: Giovanni Bellini (1430/40-1516)

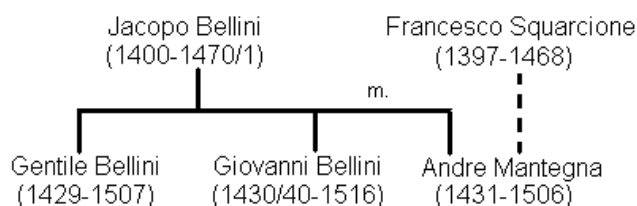


Giovanni Bellini, *Baptism*, S. Corona, Vicenza, 1500

§I – History and Context

Jacopo Bellini

The Bellini family began a period of artistic importance with Jacopo Bellini (c.1400 –



70/1)⁴¹ who was known for his monumental ability, fluid animation of characters, and mixing the Florentine style with the Paduan and Venetian. Crowe and Cavalcaselle suggest his artistic ability maintained the “conventionalism of the Italo-Byzantines and the naturalism of the rising schools”⁴². Working mainly from Venice, he was considered one of the Fathers of the Venetian artistic Renaissance and the founder of one of the two rival schools in Venice.⁴³ Jacopo, although still maintaining the style of the late Gothic period, was obviously alert to the contemporary concepts coming from archaeology, perspective and anatomy. It has been suggested that the best examples of Jacopo’s artistic personality can be found in his two surviving sketch books (Louvre, Paris and British Museum, London).⁴⁴ He was trained by Gentile da Fabrino (c.1370-1427) who was considered equal to Ghiberti (1378-1455). Jacopo numbered amongst other great students of Gentile such as Pisanello(c.1395-1455?) and Fra Angelico(c. 1400-55). Though Jacopo is a celebrated artist his greatest claim to fame comes from the second generation of his family. This includes his two sons Giovanni (c.1430/40-1516) and Gentile (1429-1507) and also his son-in-law Mantegna (1431-1506).

Venice in Jacopo Bellini’s lifetime was comparatively less artistically developed than

⁴¹ Dates of artists: I. Chilvers, ed., *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Art and Artists*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990).

⁴² J. A. Crowe, G. B. Cavalcaselle, *A History of Painting in Northern Italy*, (London: J. Murray, 1912). v1. 106.

⁴³ The other school was founded by Antonio Vivriani of Murano and his brother Girolamo who studied with Jacopo Bellini under Gentile da Fabrino Crowe, *History*, (1912). v1. 102.; P. F. Brown, *Art and Life in Renaissance Venice*, (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1997). 52.

⁴⁴ Chilvers, *Dictionary*, (1990). 38.

Florence. For Venice this occurred because of a combination of persistent warring and different working conditions e.g. collaborative rather than the more competitive Florence. With influences from innovators in Padua and Florence being used by Jacopo and his school, Venice rapidly rose to artistic influence. For the artists living in Venice this influx of ideas in late Quattrocento Italy created an exciting environment for development and innovation such as Giovanni Bellini and Titian.

Mantegna

Andrea Mantegna was one of the most significant painters of the Venetian School. Originally studying under his foster Father, Francesco Squarcione (1397-c. 1468), in Padua, he progressed in the grotesque style which was preferred by Paduan art. However, due to a legal disagreement with Squarcione concerning exploitation, Mantegna began his artistic career as an individual artist. In 1460 he was employed by Ludovico of Mantua where Mantegna remained for the rest of his life. His style has been described as having “sharp clarity of drawing, colouring, and lighting, a passion for archaeology which fed on the relative abundance of Classical remains in Northern Italy, and a mastery of perspective and foreshortening which is unequalled in the 15th century.”⁴⁵ His influence was profound and was especially significant for his brother-in-law, Giovanni Bellini. However, it was also important in shaping the work of Albrecht Dürer (1471-1528) and the Northern Renaissance.

Gentile Bellini

Gentile Bellini was Giovanni’s older brother. However, much less is known about him than is known about Giovanni. The dates for his birth are greatly contested

⁴⁵ Ibid., 284.

though it is widely accepted that Gentile was older than Giovanni because of letters which suggest that Jacopo's sketch books had been given to Gentile as his inheritance. He follows closely in the style of his Father and was widely respected for his ability. Crowe and Cavalcaselle explain "that Gentile... was master of theory, whilst Giovanni... was learned in the practice".⁴⁶ He is known not only for his works in Italy but for his time spent in Constantinople working for Sultan Mehmet II the recent conqueror of that city.⁴⁷ However, apart from this singular event in Gentile's life he never really escapes his younger brother's shadow.

Biography

Vasari claims that Giovanni, sometimes known as Giambellino,⁴⁸ died aged 90 in 1516 from this it is concluded that Giovanni was born around 1426.⁴⁹ However, the will of Anna Rinversi, the wife of Jacopo Bellini, which was written in expectation of the birth of their first child in 1429 would suggest that Vasari was mistaken on this detail. According to contemporary documents the first born Bellini child was Gentile. Thus Giovanni was born around 1432-3 or even later. Due to the absence of Giovanni in Anna's will in 1471 it has been suggested by G. Fiocco that Giovanni was born by a different mother, however without further supporting evidence this seems unlikely.⁵⁰ The controversial date for the beginning of Giovanni's life as a painter is thought to be around 1445/50 but this is also extremely controversial. Due to the collaborative environment of the family workshop it is hard to distinguish his early work. It is

⁴⁶ Crowe, *History*, (1912). v1. 118.

⁴⁷ Gentile went primarily as an artist complying with a commission, but also as a political peace offering from the Doge after the Doge refused an invitation to the marriage of the Sultan's son. Crowe, *History*, (1912). v1. 127.

⁴⁸ Chilvers, *Dictionary*, (1990). 38.

⁴⁹ G. Vasari, *The Lives of the Artists*, J. Conaway Bondanella, P. Bondanell, eds., (Oxford, Oxford university Press, 1991).; M. Olivari, *Giovanni Bellini*, (Firenze: Scala/Riverside, 1990).

⁵⁰ Olivari, *Bellini*, (1990). 3.

thought that his education began when very young. The first exact recorded date concerning Giovanni is 9th April 1459 when he appeared as a witness for a court case. Giovanni continued working with his family until at least 1460 since, according to Fra Valerio Polidoro, the now lost *Gattamelata Altarpiece* was signed by all the Bellini men.⁵¹ Crowe and Cavalcaselle suggest that one of Bellini's first solo works was *The Virgin and Child* (Milan). They also propose that around this time Jacopo and his two sons moved from Venice to Padua.⁵² This was an important move for the Bellini Family because it was in Padua that Jacopo became the rival of Squarcione and the Bellini boys first met and became friends with Mantegna. In this period Giovanni Bellini became a painter in his own right. It can be stated that by the 1470's Bellini was the leading painter of altarpieces and small devotional art works. Bellini was officially recognised when commissioned to work on a cycle of history paintings for the Doge's palace in 1479. However, his earliest surviving dated work was the *Maddona degli Alberetti* dated as late as 1487. Apart from a brief sojourn in the Marches to produce the *Coronation of the Virgin* (1471-74) it is thought that Bellini did not leave Venice throughout his working life. Over his long life he formed one of the largest workshops and produced many works. The large compositions such as the Pesaro *Coronation* or the *Baptism*, here studied, are considered exceptional in his career because he preferred the smaller devotional pieces.⁵³

⁵¹ Ibid., 3.

⁵² Crowe, *History*, (1912). v1. 140.

⁵³ P. Humfrey, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Giovanni Bellini*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004). 4-5.

Style

Within Giovanni's art can be seen two distinct styles: the Byzantine and the Flemish - "the former presenting iconic majesty and the analytical precision of the latter".⁵⁴

These two styles were important both artistically and culturally because of Venice's unique economic connections. In addition to this, the work left by Donatello in Padua from his 10 year sojourn (1443-53) and the art of Mantegna (as mentioned above) had long lasting effects on Bellini. Donatello encouraged Giovanni to adopt the sophistication of Florentine art while the Mantegna influence maintained the colourist techniques of the Venetian school and the Paduan grotesque. Bellini's most celebrated achievement was in developing the move from tempura to oil paints as the standard medium. This new technique originally brought to Venice by Antonello da Messina (c.1430-79) who according to Vasari had learnt the technique from Jan Van Eyck.⁵⁵ Another telling mark of Bellini's art work was the use of *chiaroscuro* (hatching) in the preliminary drawings. This was a definite identifier with the Flemish style of construction. At the time, this technique was thought to be a foolish waste of effort since the paint would cover the drawing. By modern scholarship it has been suggested instead, that Bellini was using this method to develop "more solid and volumetrically constructed plastic quality."⁵⁶ Another stylistic quality of Bellini's work was the use of backgrounds as important factors in the composition. This can be seen clearly in his *Cruxifixion* (1455-60 previously in San Salvador, Venice now Museo Correr, Venice)⁵⁷ where the background is formed in layers creating both perspective and adding realism to the images. However, Bellini's use of background far exceeds simply using perspective he also incorporates in the background symbols to help

⁵⁴ Ibid., 3.

⁵⁵ Chilvers, *Dictionary*, (1990). 15.

⁵⁶ Olivari, *Bellini*, (1990). 8.

⁵⁷ Olivari, *Bellini*, (1990). 9.

narrate the image and identify its characters. Bellini's *St Jerome reading in the Countryside* is a good example of this skill since even the trees and the crumbling rocks can be read figuratively.⁵⁸ This heavy use of emblematic items was a main component of the later Mannerist Period (accepted as starting c. 1520) and makes Bellini a significant forerunner of this style.

Commission

The Baptism was created as an altarpiece above the newly built altar in the church of Santa Corona in Venice. The Santa Corona was built by the Dominicans 1260-70 by Bishop Bartholomew of Braganca (c.1200-1271) partially as an act of liberation following the death of Ezzelino III da Romano (1194-1259) who was noted for his tyranny. The building was known as the 'church of the crown' because Bishop Bartholomew was presented by the King Louis IX of France a piece of the true cross and a thorn from the crown Jesus wore. These relics were housed in the church Bartholomew built.⁵⁹ The *Baptism of Christ* by Bellini is found on the fifth altar on the left aisle. The altar was constructed in 1500-1502 it is dedicated to John the Baptist.⁶⁰ It was commissioned by Battista Graziani, Count Palatine⁶¹, for his return from the Holy Land. The Garzadori Altar itself was made from white stone by the workshop of Tommaso da Lugano and Bernardino da Como with contributions from Rocco da Vicenza. It is adorned with columns and a cornice with marine figures and monsters. In the top of the arch there is a relief of the virgin and child. The setting of

⁵⁸ Olivari, *Bellini*, (1990). 47.

⁵⁹ Devlin, W. (1907). Bartholomew of Braganca. In *The Catholic Encyclopedia*. New York: Robert Appleton Company. Retrieved June 17, 2009 from New Advent: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/02315a.htm>; The Rough Guide to Venice and the Veneto 302

⁶⁰ Robertson, G., *Giovanni Bellini*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968. 111.

⁶¹ An hereditary and honorary position conferred by pope or emperor dating back to the early medieval period similar to a knighthood. P. F. Grendler, *The Universities of the Italian Renaissance*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002). 183-187.

the painting gives the image a sense of being seen through a window which helps to create a meditative setting for the viewer to remember their baptism, the mission, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ.

Description: Trinity

In describing the *Baptism*, the composition is easily separated into three categories. These are the Trinity, other figures, and landscape. The image is rectangular with a curved apex. In a vertical line at the centre of the image is the Trinity. The Father and a host of angels are positioned in the centre of the curve with Jesus standing on the banks of the Jordan and the Holy Spirit approximately one fifth of the way down between the Father and the Son. The Father is presented as an elderly man with a long grey beard and hair. Only half of his body is revealed the lower half is covered by the cloud. There is a light burst around his head and his eyes are looking down towards Jesus. He is wearing a blue mantle over a red tunic. The mantle is wrapped around the left shoulder and billows off to the right side of the Father. His arms are open wide with the left hand slightly higher than the right. This gives the impression of either blessing or of the release of the dove. Around him are twelve cherubic forms in pairs at six points of an ellipse with only faces, shoulders, and wings visible. The top quartet are dark blue, the middle are vermillion, and the lower ones orange.⁶² The Holy Spirit is shown in dove form with the head pointing down and a light burst halo around its body. From the breast of the dove is a particularly strong light flash pointing towards the Christ figure. The dove is placed at the base of the cloud formation at the point where the curve of the apex joins the rectangular part of the image. The Christ figure is directly below the dove. He has long brown hair and a

⁶² Robertson, *Bellini*, (1968). 111.

short beard. He looks out of the picture towards the viewer. His arms are folded across his chest. He is wearing a loin cloth wrapped around his waist. The weight of his body is placed on his left leg which makes the upper part of his body twist to the right and the lower half of his body look slightly contorted; especially his right leg. Bellini has made his skin very pale.

Description: Others

There are four other individuals in the image; four women and John the Baptist. John the Baptist is standing on a rock with more than half his body above Christ. He is leaning forward and pouring water from a bowl onto the head of Jesus. John is dark skinned with long black hair and a short black beard. In the crook of his left arm he is holding a long cross and in his left hand is holding a scroll. He is dressed with a sleeveless tunic which is grey/brown in colour. Over this is a dark green mantle around the left shoulder and wrapped in the left arm. His right arm is stretched over Christ and with a bowl in his hand he pours water on Christ's head. His weight is on the right leg with the left leg unnaturally turned behind him. He has a black line halo around his head. His eyes are turned downwards towards the scroll in his hand. The women on the left hand side of the image are clustered in the arrangement of an upturned triangle. The tallest woman is closest to Christ and has a red mantle over both shoulders with a black dress underneath. Her hair and face are in the Classical style. Around her head is a black line halo. Her right hand clutches the mantle and her left hand is raised as if pointing to the situation. She looks directly at the back of Christ. The second tallest woman is on the left hand side of the image and her head is set at profile and looking at Christ. She is wearing a yellow dress and has the same features as the first woman. Her hands are together in a pious gesture. Around her

head there is a black line halo. The third woman is crouched between the other two. She is wearing a blue dress and a blue toga/sheet. Her features are much the same as the other women and she too is looking at Christ. However, for the third woman, where the other halos are black she has a gold halo.

Description: Environment

This composition is rich with detail and technique in the landscape. Beneath the clouds of heaven, the earthly parts of the image are broken into five segments. The segments have a feeling of artificiality almost like they were scenery in the setting of a theatrical production. The sky between the clouds and the scenery suggest dusk, however, the colour juxtaposed between the upper blue and the lower orange suggests a much less natural break in the sky. Within the lower section are numerous and more realistic clouds. In the far distance are majestic blue mountains. In the middle distance one can see hills. To the left is a fortification. Slightly to the right of the fortification is another cluster of architecture on a hill. At the right hand side of the image is what looks like a tomb with a visitor on the way to the tomb. There is a line created from Jesus, through the cross which John holds, to the tomb. Above the tomb are trees and particularly one large palm tree. Leading from the middle distance to directly behind the foreground is the river Jordan. In the foreground we see the figures including Christ stood at the edge of the river. Behind and left of the women a tree stretches up towards heaven. Beneath the women are rocks. Under John there are rocks and some more plants. Oddly there is what looks like a parrot on a branch between John and Jesus. Between the two sets of rocks Jesus stands on what looks like either a sandy beach or a dry stretch of the river bed.

History of the Baptism Image

As with all images of the Renaissance there are pathways of continuity from one artist to another and back through the ages. This particular style of representation used in the Baptism has a far reaching precedent. It would be folly to attempt to identify the originator of this construction. However, the earliest image of the baptism of Christ (3rd century) is located in the crypt of Lucina at the entrance to the catacombs of St Calixtus. It shows John the Baptist wearing a philosophers robe standing on the right hand side of the Jordan offering a hand to the baptized man as he steps out of the water. He is represented as an unclothed youth and has been baptised by immersion; the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove descends from above. Late 3rd Century images show the Baptist with a hand upon Christ. Often John is seen holding a philosophers scroll, and in most images can be identified by this mark. In the 4th and 5th Centuries, parallels were made between the Baptism and Moses striking the rock to receive water gushing out. From the 6th Century God was often represented by a hand coming from heaven. Around the 7th Century angels and witnesses begin to appear in the image. In Carolingian images there is often a personification of the Jordan. Until the 11th Century, Christ regularly stood unclothed in the water in frontal pose with his arms hanging by his sides. From the end of the 12th Century onwards the image of God the Father replaces the symbol of the hand of God. No landscape elements appear until the 13th Century. Until the 14th Century immersion was the dominant form of baptism. Later, however, infusion became the accepted normal procedure. This shift appears didactically in the images, instead of a laying on of hands, water is poured from a dish or a shell. For a while there is a mix of styles like Andrea Pisano's relief on the bronze doors of the Baptistery in Florence (1330-6). The number of angels fluctuate between one and three in attendance but often by the renaissance they are

removed entirely. Beginning with Giotto, landscape starts to become more important in the images of baptism. From the 15th century onwards Jesus is seen out of the water and in prayerful positions, either kneeling or bowed with arms folded the symbol for submission. Also around this period the Baptism begins to be placed as the starting point in Jesus' life on the journey towards the passion and so the pictures often reflect this idea.⁶³

The image that is being examined in this thesis is very common for this period in its layout of the major elements: Trinity arranged vertically, three watchers on the left, John the Baptist, Christ between two rocks. However, in the detail it is unusual: full depiction of the Father, the bowl of water already mostly poured, the introduction of distance in the landscape, a better geometric construction, without three angels yet changing them into women. It was not unusual to find an image of the baptism of Christ above an altar previous to this painting by Bellini. This type image is generally found where altarpieces designed for churches dedicated to John the Baptist, or where the donor patron was named after him or there was some other connection of patronage e.g. Florence's patron Saint was John the Baptist. Since the altar is dedicated to John the Baptist it is expected there should be a piece of art dedicated to him. However, in this context it appears without any other images. This is unusual since most art which represents the baptism, are found as devotional works within the setting of the life of Christ e.g. Piero Della Francesca's *Baptism* (1450) which was part of a polyptich.

⁶³ A. N. Didron, *Christian Iconography: The History of Christian Art in the Middle Ages*, (London: G. Bell, 1886). v1. 127-143.

§II – Suffering

Father

Introduction

The most striking aspects of the concept of Trinity within this picture, as with the Crivelli image, is the depiction of the Father as a human being. Though Bellini is not the first to depict the Father in a human form, he is one of the first to attempt a reinterpretation of the human in terms of divine through a partial revelation of the Father. The importance of this reworking of the Father's image is that it caused the virtually universal format of the Baptism image to become a more powerful representation by better struggling with the theological implications of an image of the Father. Furthermore, this was particularly important during the late renaissance because humanism caused divine artistic subjects to become orientated more towards their human qualities. So much so, that the normally forbidden doctrines of the past could have humanity imparted to them. The image of the Father is a prime example of this and it occurred continually from the 15th to the 17th century after which a sense of the transcendence of the Father, and Trinity as a whole, was restored.

Anthropomorphism

The physicality of image of the Father in human form does not portray strongly the divinity of the Father. By doing this Bellini creates a helpful image for the viewer to attach their personal hopes and fears. However, the anthropomorphism creates a problem because the Father is not simply an old man with a long grey beard. Furthermore, as many biblical commentators mention, to depict the Father in this way is blasphemous. For them, Bellini has stepped over the line which preserves the divine

and indescribable nature of God. Bellini's choice of a human Father clearly expresses the humanism which was typical of the late Renaissance. A marker of this emphasis can be seen in the Father's long grey beard. Traditionally, in the more allegorical images, this was used to represent wisdom but in Bellini's realistic construction it suggests more a sense of time and ageing. The humanity is especially important when focusing on the relationship between the Father and the Son because their similar appearance is a measure of their relationship. By using realistic human imagery Bellini is affirming the notion that we, as created beings in the image of God, have a similar appearance to God the Father. However, Bellini is still trying to represent the divine too. He does this through the Father's disengaged expression of immutability. Yet this sort of expression creates a jarring effect in the viewer where the humanity of the Father is juxtaposed by his divine action. To explain this further the relationship which the Father has with the other elements of the Trinity must be considered.

Relationship with the Son

Though there is the biblical expression of Father and Son at work in this image -in fact used to justify the representation of the Father - there is no emotional connection between the Father and the Son. Though an emotional attachment is not central to either divinity or humanity it is important to notice it because it affects both areas. Matthew 3: 17 states that the Father proclaims this is his Son with whom he is "well pleased". It seems odd then that Bellini should cause the Father to be so dispassionate in his interaction with the Son. There is an emphasis on separation in this image between the heavens and the earth. This will be discussed in detail below. For the purposes of the discussion of suffering it must be noted that there is no real sense of suffering in the relationship of the Father to the Son and so no real expression of

humanity despite the Father's physical form. This is even highlighted by the separation which is created at the point the heavens meet the sky.

Robertson suggests that "the outspread arms of the Father recall, perhaps deliberately, a Trinity composition in which Christ is raised on the cross before him".⁶⁴ This certainly offers a very powerful teleological aspect to the image; where baptism points to crucifixion. This would be especially important for those contemporary observers who came to the altar to participate in the mass or to pray because it encompassed the Christian life from birth to death. Furthermore, it highlights the end result of baptism; which for Christ was to die on the cross and for the believer it is to take up the cross and follow that example. In this way the future suffering of Christ seems always present. In the mercy seat images, which Robertson here alludes to, there is a sense in which the Father participates in the suffering of the Son on the cross as he appears to carry the burden of cross and Christ. This composition reflects that idea in order that the humanity and the physicality of the Father and Son in the image might not be lost in the expression of their divinity. However, to present the Father in this way suggests an element of conflict not often seen in images of the Trinity of this period. Whether this is an unresolved conflict in Bellini's thought or a deliberate paradox is unknown.

Jesus

Introduction

In thinking about the Son in this image it is important to consider that the popular emphasis of the times regarding the life of Jesus as an innovation of the Franciscans. Furthermore the humanist movement of the renaissance added to Franciscan ideology

⁶⁴ Robertson, *Bellini*, (1968). 112.

by encouraging a more materialistic response to the divine. The way the friars understood the world and doctrine was quite different from the other groups within the church. The two ideas which have the most relevance for a discussion of this image are the restoration of creation as holy and the humanity of Christ. The former will be looked at later but the latter is very important when considering any image of the Renaissance since the ideas blended well with the humanist philosophy of art and culture. However, as will be discussed in the next section Bellini very subtly blends these thoughts with an emphasis of the divine. For now only the human elements must be presented.

Physicality: weight

The depiction of the Son has the impression of weight given to him by Bellini. This illusion is created by the right leg supporting the body with the left leg positioned slightly behind. This pose was typical of the period and reflects the pose found in statues to give the stone strong balance to prevent breaking. In painted art there is no need for such a calculated pose yet Christ's posture in this image heightens the sense of reality. He is not some figure who can stand unnaturally but he requires the same support needed to stabilise a normal human body. This impression of weight which Bellini creates, helps us to imagine Christ as a real physical person rather than a divine being.

Physicality: Arms

By examining the body closer it can be seen that the folding of the arms adds to this sense of real human weight as mentioned above because the muscles in the upper body react to the weight. This helps the viewer to identify with the image because it

has a natural quality. The arms are held in a particular way in order to suggest the submissive quality of Jesus. This position can be seen in many of the Mary images (especially the Annunciation) yet, until this period, it occurs infrequently in images where there is a baptism. It would appear that Bellini is giving the impression through the positioning of the body that Jesus is under the weight of the mission he has been commissioned for and is submitting to the will of the Father. In this Bellini helps the viewer to understand the difficulty of the path Christ trod and so helps the viewer to overcome their own difficulties. Again the cross and tomb, off to the picture's right hand side, suggest the pain and suffering which the submission of Jesus will bring.

Physicality: Eyes

In this image Bellini uses a very unusual technique with the eyes. In most images of this period there is a narrator looking out from the picture and accusing the viewer in order to create an incorporation of painting space and reality. Usually that person is someone in the crowd, rarely the main players. This allows the main characters in the image to continue the play without regard for the viewer. Also, the narrator in this type of picture is almost always pointing towards Christ or suggesting to the viewer that they should pay close attention in the same way that the other 'extras' in the image are paying close attention. In this image, however, the narrator of the scene is Jesus himself. This small detail achieves several results, some of which will be examined in the next section. One such idea which is transferred through use of this device is that Jesus is allowed to identify with the viewer. In this way the painting has a direct didactic/devotional dimension as indeed the preaching of the Dominican order was intended to be heard. Since Jesus is the focus of the picture through which all the other elements find their purpose, the viewer is drawn in by the Son's gaze and

included amongst the activity of the picture. The image becomes less about teaching or forming appropriate rubric but more about the needs of the person who attends the altar. In this way the composition does not only represent the suffering to come of Christ but it accepts and incorporates the suffering of the observer. This heightens the human element of sharing. Yet as will be explored in the next section the gaze of Christ creates a divine paradigm as well because of their impression of being all knowing.

Cross and Tomb

Bellini's depiction of the baptism always has the greater narrative in mind. The son faces steadfastly forwards and yet in the background there are reminders of his dual responsibilities. On the left the city representing the people of the world for whom Christ came and on the right the spectre of death and resurrection hope. Furthermore, as has already been mentioned the Father's arms also recall to the viewer the task which Jesus has to accomplish. In this way there is no sense of celebration in the image as you might expect having read the bible passage concerning this story. Instead, lurking in the background, there is a continuous reminder of death and duty. It is probable that this metaphorical expression would have resonated with those who used the altar as they faced duty and the threat of death through sickness and wars. This human emphasis would have helped them to identify with the tasks Christ had to accomplish. Also, this image of Jesus would help the viewer to see Christ as role model unlike the medieval image which exalted Christ out of his humanity.

Relationships

In an image where the humanity of Christ is emphasised it might be expected to see some sort of artistic connection, through colour or feature, between John and Jesus to highlight their familial relationship. However, Bellini separates the cousins as much as possible through use of the colour of the skin. But in contrast there is not, apart from the luminescent halo, a great similarity between the Father and the Son either. In this way then Bellini tries to draw similarities and difference as he treads the tightrope of the human-divine paradox in the representation of the Son. He uses the human form to present Christ as connected to the other figures and yet through artistic device he separates Jesus from them.

Holy Spirit

Introduction

The Holy Spirit is the most difficult image to discuss in this picture from the context of suffering and the human dimension. However, to accept this as the conclusion would do a disservice to the artistry of Bellini. The dove does not take on a human appearance and so is not affected by the normal conventions of suffering as defined. This said there is still a physical presence through the use of the form of a dove for the portrayal of the Holy Spirit which steps beyond divinity and into representationalism. The biblical witness would certainly agree with the use of this metaphor as an appropriate form for the Holy Spirit. Yet there have been other artworks to use another human figure for the Holy Spirit or to use seven angels to represent the gifts of the spirit.⁶⁵ However, even with the use of the dove there is suffering in the self limitation to a physical form. This limitation is heightened even more by the very

⁶⁵ L. Twining, *Christian Symbolism and Emblems of Early and Medieval Christian Art*, (London: John Murray, 1885). 52-78.

anatomical creation of the dove. Often in Trinitarian images the dove is present but has a somewhat cartoon or vague aspect to it. Titian's *La Gloria* is a good example of this where the dove appears as a haze in dove shape rather than a physical form. Bellini's dove is very clear and well defined. Furthermore, it has a sense of movement which suggests flight and descent. This increases the reality of the story of the Baptism but also creates a lessened divinity. Even the way the dove seems to be almost forcible pushing through from the heavenly realm to the earthly one suggests a struggle of blessing.

Others

John the Baptist

In this image John the Baptist, though an important figure in the story, is marginalised. It could even be considered from where the eye is directed that the bowl in his hand has more importance than he does. This is quite remarkable considering the altar being dedicated to John the Baptist. Yet he is an important figure for maintaining certain standards within the composition. As has already been described he is Jesus cousin but the two men do not look alike yet there is that connection within the picture. Notice that the Baptiser does not look at the bowl but at the person he is baptising. Though John is performing the blessing it is John himself that is being blessed by this encounter. Again notice the physical and anatomically correct features of John the Baptist. He, more so than Jesus, reflects a person of the times and yet he is not as he would be described in the bible and not as he is depicted in many of the pictures of him at the time Bellini creates this image. Bellini has to some extent made John into the heroic figure as well. However, John's figure is not as refined as Jesus. Rather than looking graceful John is slightly ungainly as he leans over the rock to

pour the water. His back foot rather than being perfectly classical looks slightly lame and contorted due to the unusually defined light on the calves. It is evident that less time has been spent in the construction of the Baptist as with the construction of Jesus. Even the clothes express this since it is easier to paint swathes of cloth than the muscles and tonality required for the physical frame. However, John the Baptist's role is also very important in that though he is not the narrator to the viewer he is the narrator of the internal working. He represents the first step in the direction of the cross which he bears and the tomb which stands behind him. In this way he acts as a physical metaphor to the suffering of Christ.

The Women

It is extremely difficult to discuss the women in this picture since in the past they have always been angels and not women. In fact in many of the commentaries on Bellini and his works these women are described as angels because of the prevalence of that idea in the Baptismal imagery. However, I would argue that they should not be designated angels but women since they do not have the necessary bearing of angels e.g. wings. This leads to a difficulty because Bellini's blatant movement from tradition must have had a reason yet this discussion is not taken up by any commentator nor is it possible to do so due to a lack of evidence. Thinking of these three as women and not angels does help when expressing the nature of the human-divine paradox in this image. For this image to have angels physically present in supernatural form would compromise the division which Bellini has created of the human and divine realms in the composition of the picture. It seems that everything that is intended to be spiritual remains within the arch of the picture and all that is of earth is within the square section. If Bellini were to use angels as attendants for Christ

in this image then this carefully constructed division would not work as well. It is interesting to think along these lines because this would explain the unnatural position of the Holy Spirit who is usually found much closer to Christ than is portrayed here.

Environment

Tomb and Cross

As has already been mentioned there are numerous details in the background. In this last part the buildings and their metaphors, the flora and fauna, and the emphasis on the natural as a backdrop will be examined. Though it could be argued that these things are not directly involved with the Trinity, Bellini's composition is such that it is impossible to discount them in their effect on the understanding of Trinity.⁶⁶ As far as the architecture is concerned I have already touched on the difficulties with ascertaining the identity of the buildings on the left. However, the one closest to the frame is definitely a fortress and the cluster on the hill is a church. The symbolism present here is quite subtle especially when examining Bellini's evocation of suffering. Both symbols could represent some of the major elements in the lives of the Venetians: war and religion. Certainly within the years leading up to this images production these two themes would have found significant place in the culture of Venice. Although, if taken within this image they pale into insignificance compared to the rest of the painting's content. If it is understood that the background essentially represents the future then in as much as the cross leads to the empty tomb the establishment of the church leads to war.

⁶⁶ This is possibly taken from near Pesaro, a garrison called Gradara. It might also be suggested that the small church is the San Francesco. However, both the assertions are speculative since the discussion on architecture does not generally examine the *Baptism* and these sources have been drawn from debate on Bellini's Pesaro *Coronation of the Virgin* and other images. (Humfrey, "Bellini and Architecture" in *Companion*, (2004). 148-50.). Robertson speculates whether this might be "a direct reference to the landscape of the holy land, from which the donor of the picture had just returned." (Robertson, *Bellini*, (1968). 111.)

Fauna and Flora

As with most of the works in the Renaissance there is little information about the specific objects contained within. Unless you have contemporaneous documents or can find the rare scholar who has written concerning individual paintings and identified specific plants and animals. When it comes to flora and fauna the meanings of plants and animals are largely speculative. However, the naturalistic elements in Bellini's images play such an important part it would be inconsiderate to gloss over them. It is pertinent to only mention the clearly identifiable parts: the palm at the top right and the parrot next to Jesus. This means that the tree above the women and the branch under the Baptist remain shrouded in uncertainty. The Palm tree stands for victory and justice but also is used in connection with Psalm 42 "the righteous shall flourish like a palm tree".⁶⁷ Often the Palm Tree is associated with the church and immortality to come. Again these ideas underline the ideas of death in the image. The Parrot is quite a confusing symbol since its use is quite rare. The parrot has been linked to Mary because of its colours (blue and red mimicking the Virgin's clothing) but also has been known to be used interchangeably with a partridge which is again a symbol of the church.⁶⁸ The meaning of such a symbol seems to be the inclusion of the followers of Christ in the drama while maintaining the simplicity of the composition.

⁶⁷ Twining, *Symbolism*, (1885). 192-4.

⁶⁸ G. Fergusson, *Signs and Symbols in Christian Art*, (UK: Oxford University Press, 1961). 12-30.

§III– Signification

Father

Introduction

Traditionally in images of the Baptism of Christ where Trinity was expressed the Father was shown as hands reaching from heaven. This was considered an acceptable image to use since it was already present in the bible as the hand which writes on the wall in Daniel 5:5. However, in this image the usually most hidden and unrepresentable aspect of God which the very sight of would cause death (Exodus 33:20) is revealed in full glory. God the Father is not only revealed but made into the image of man. This image of the Father does not exhibit true humanity but instead is a character of the imagination who floats in the sky and is grotesquely only half formed. There is a great advantage in this type of representation since it clearly announces the Father as divine. Though the Father is human in appearance there is a sense of limitlessness to the figure. In the same way that the entrance to a tunnel might suggest untold depths the shadow and unnatural tapering of the Father's body suggest an unlimited recession into the clouds.

Clothing and Hair

To the renaissance viewer the hair of the Father indicates strongly the identity of the person in the clouds. The long grey beard and hair distinguish him from the other members of the Trinity. They also act as a symbol of the wisdom of the Father. The clothing too is reminiscent of other images which portray the Father. The garments that are being worn are almost identical in colour and style to the garments worn in *The Trinity* (1427) by Masaccio (Fig. 9). The image by Masaccio is in the style of the 'mercy seat' which depicts Jesus crucified and the Father stood behind holding the

cross with the Holy spirit between their heads. The similarities between this image and others are quite striking and might be another contributing factor to the comments Robertson has made about the Father in Bellini's image, appearing to hold his arms out in the crucified manner as a foreshadowing of Jesus fate. However, there is a contradiction in this symbolism of the Father since his garments billow to the pictures left which suggests they are subject to nature. This adds a sense of realism and movement to this otherwise still image but detracts from the divine representation of the Father.

Aureole

Another symbol of the Father's divinity is the use of the radiance around his head. Bellini seems make use of two types of halo. The first, a perfect circle band around the head, is seen on characters like John the Baptist and the three women which suggest a saintly quality. However, the light around the Father suggests something much greater. The nimbus of light much like a sunburst clearly represents divinity since it radiates from within the Father. Another feature of this holy emanation is that it does not have any effect on any object; even the hair is not illuminated. This is a more subtle technique than a simple halo and very effective. Also, the illumination of the hair is not a mistake because it can be seen that Bellini understood the physics of colour and light reflections from the pink glow which Christ's garment gains from the bright pink/red mantle worn by the inmost woman.

Jesus

Physicality

Though Jesus in this image has been drawn with care to make him appear as human, and so anatomically correct as possible, there is still something extremely otherworldly about his appearance. His person overflows with perfection. There are no blemishes on his body, the lines and contours are smooth, the colours delicate. As has been mentioned it is surprising that Jesus, despite the amount of time he spent outside travelling the country, has been depicted as a pale man. The colouration and stature are pointers to the special nature of the Christ figure. He is unlike any other person. Even the position he is standing suggests grace of movement and lightness of weight. This lightness is reminiscent of the statues and images of the gods and goddesses of ancient Rome and when used with Christ allows the viewer to be able to tell instantly the importance and divinity of Jesus. Furthermore, this appearance makes the human seem divine through the heroic position and countenance. This heroism in the image would possibly have placed Christ apart from the viewer while giving that person someone to exemplify. Another aspect which is interesting in this image is the likeness the face of Christ bears with the image found on the Turin Shroud (Fig. 10). It is uncertain whether or not Bellini ever had the chance to view the Shroud, however the facial features and positioning of the head suggest the possibility that he knew of it. To some people at the time this would have also been a recognisable image associated with the divinity of Christ and the incorporation of such features would have given the image a special quality.

Radiance

In the portrayal of Jesus, as with the Father, Bellini has used swathes of symbolism to illustrate the divinity of Christ. Though the prevalent humanistic movement of the time tries to envisage Christ as more human than previous generations, Bellini mixes

the Byzantine style with the Renaissance to create a very subtle blending of styles which help to maintain the divinity while highlighting the humanity. This skill is continued in his followers and those that were later known as the Mannerists. The key to it lies within the physical form of Christ. In this image we see a Christ who has muscles, weight, and posture and yet there is an unusual grace to his body a perfection which is only heightened by the coarseness of John the Baptist. This can be seen in a comparison of the colour of skin between the cousins. Jesus is pale, John is brown. Also, Jesus appearance is heroic which means that there are no blemishes, brokenness or ungainliness. To make the main figure in an image to have a heroic visage was very common in the Renaissance period even to the extent that anyone looking at this image might see the similarity in it as in any of the classical statues of roman deities or in Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus* (1486) (Fig. 3).

The arms and eyes of Christ in this image are important as has already been mentioned in the previous section. However, in as much as they might be understood to display human traits they can equally express a sense of the divine. The arms though suggesting a submissive role of Christ to the task also from a didactic outlook tell the viewer that Jesus is in a perfect relationship with the Father. This image is usually used to describe the holiness of Mary and yet to use it with Christ presents a complimentary image of Jesus holiness. The gaze of Jesus not only reflects the pastoral message of the image but also there is a perceived sense of defiance as if Jesus is asking the viewer to remember the words of Exodus 3:14 "I AM who I AM". In this way the physical gaze of Jesus proclaims of the depth of the eternal and again gives Jesus an element of the mystical.

Aside from the subtle blending in the physical there is also the slight, almost hazy, radiance from the head of Christ. Much like the Father this light displays divinity. Taking that idea further, it might be conceivable to consider the light from the Father being the same light as in the Son and the Holy Spirit possibly reflecting the idea of the creedal phrase “God from God, light from light”.⁶⁹ This idea may well be furthered by the line of light which connects the Father to the Son through the Holy Spirit and the baptismal bowl. Not only is there the light from within but Jesus very obviously from the amount of external light used in the painting to create the focus of the image. However, again Bellini creates a clever space because the eye is drawn instantly to Christ but then overpowered and brought upwards by the colour and majesty of the Father through the Holy Spirit. In this way too is seen the use of artistic technique to maintain the theological reality of unity in trinity.

Another way in which Bellini’s Jesus signifies the divine nature is by being the focus of the Baptism and what that symbolised for the viewer. This image could be interpreted simply as a man being baptised under the will of God. However, this image suggests a much more profound didactic statement that baptism is not simply something that one does but it is an ordinance of God and performed by God. This authority that the image assumes is in the portrayal of Jesus as the divine cause of this rite. This is important because the image assumes a particular way of doing baptism as the authorised practice. As I mentioned in an earlier section the act of infusion was only the normal practice from the 14th century. This image however suggests that this is the only way of thinking of this sacrament. Therefore, creating a presupposed divinity in the humanity of Christ by giving authority over sacraments to Christ.

⁶⁹ Nicene Creed (325) cited by <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/nicene.htm> Retrieved June 17, 2009.

Holy Spirit

In this image the third person of the Trinity appears as a dove. This shape as was expressed in the previous section was the standard expression for the Holy Spirit. It would be instantly identifiable as the other member of the triune Godhead. Bellini uses the radiance which surrounds the dove to continue this theme of light being the unifying factor of the Trinity. However, the light around the dove is much more brilliant than the other two figures this could suggest that in Bellini's thinking the Holy Spirit itself is the mediator of the light of God. This would certainly explain why the light of the Father must be filtered through the Holy Spirit before reaching the bowl and Christ. The dove as with Christ has an element of perfection which is significant. It is white and without blemish, perfectly formed and within the scheme of the image is placed perfectly too. The points of the doves wings meet in diagonals with the ends of the father's fingers and the three women on one side and John the Baptist on the other. It is impressive to see in this image the Holy Spirit acting as a focal point for the entire picture unlike in many of the other images of the time where the Holy spirit was seen almost as unnecessary to the form of the picture. To place the Holy Spirit at the centre suggests two things: that the dove is an expression of divinity and that for this story the Holy Spirit is extremely important. A disturbing feature of this image is that the Holy Sprit seems to take the place of intermediary between heaven and earth rather than the more theological understanding of Jesus being the mediator. Furthermore, the relative positions suggest a heretical reading of the image where the Son is subordinated to the Father and the Holy Spirit in a hierarchical positioning. However, it does not seem to be the case since even though the Holy Spirit is a focal point the faces of the Son and the Father are also highlighted by the

lines as mentioned above. Furthermore, the importance is offset by the interruption of the bowl as a focal point on the horizon.

Others

As has already been stated the altar upon which this painting was incorporated was dedicated to John the Baptist. It is easy to see his importance in Bellini's work since he is elevated and physically larger than any other person presented. However, the focus is not on John the Baptist but on Christ and the geometry stretching from the Son to the Father through the Holy Spirit. This is important to note since this was the way John lived his life as well. In the gospels John has a brief moment of fame but he was quickly replaced by Jesus. However, at each point in the gospel John is talking about Christ and not himself. So it is in his character to be pointing towards Christ. This is seen particularly in the Baptism scene both here and in the gospel where John's activities disappear in comparison with the significance of the Father's words and the Son's importance. In this image it is not only in significance that John points to the divinity of Christ but he also carries the scroll which makes the viewer think of the bible and he carries a cross reminding the viewer of the role of Christ. John's role in this image is to emphasise Christ.

Environment

Architecture

The architecture in this image, as we have already seen suggests concepts of war and peace but they also could be taken as typological for the heavenly cities. Certainly, this picture has an unearthly quality to it despite Bellini's attempts to root it in reality. The figures are too perfectly drawn, the three women are indicative of angels, the

trinity appear with choirs of angels. The architecture seems only to add to this feeling of perfection. The buildings are without flaw as if they were newly built but they also have perfect proportions and due to the cartoon like aspect of the mountains they seem to be part of an otherworldly scene. Though this is probably not a deliberate action by Bellini it certainly creates the impression that the world in which the Baptism takes place is not exactly real but more akin to an allegorical dream.

Flora and Fauna

As was expressed in the last section where flora and fauna were discussed there are only some items within the picture which can confidently identified. Out of those symbols the palm tree and the parrot are the ones which have an impact on this discussion. The palm tree as has already been mentioned is a symbol for death. However, it also has other meanings. It is thought to be a symbol for victory coming from the Roman tradition and carried into Christian symbolism. The palm was often used in images of martyr's because of their victory in death.⁷⁰ Also, "from its continual verdure it was considered to be an emblem of Immortality."⁷¹ This is another apposite reading of the palm tree in its context of Trinity, and as it is planted next to a typological tomb. Through this we get a strong sense of the divine side of Christ. The parrot on the other hand is slightly more ambiguous. As has been mentioned it is a symbol for the Virgin and sometimes used to denote the church. However, the feeling within the picture would suggest more the church universal rather than the church visible. It suggests the right of the church to partake both in the event of the Baptism of Christ but also in the individuals own baptism. There is a

⁷⁰ Ferguson, *Symbols*, (1961). 36.

⁷¹ Twining, *Symbolism*, (1885). 192.

strong metaphor here for the church's participation in the life of Christ. This again makes the image seem orientated towards the divine rather than the human.

Nature

The last area to cover before going onto the conclusion for this section is to again assert the way Bellini has used nature in this image to convey some of the underlying themes. The clarity with which Bellini creates a separation between heaven and earth in this image is quite astounding. Even the Holy Spirit does not really leave the realm of heaven but comes as close to earth as possible. Yet for there to be a necessary split means that there is an ambiguity in the lower half concerning its reality. In this way the background of the picture is set to reinforce the idea of divinity within the whole composition. Furthermore, the background becomes a part of the Trinity's action in the world and taken up into the perfection of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

However, the last point of this section must be left to R. Kasl and his book *Bellini and the Art of Devotion* where he makes clear the importance Bellini places on nature within his compositions. He describes it accurately as a "poetic embrace of nature".⁷²

By which he means that one can read the image in numerous ways and it be applicable to the subject in question and yet may never have been specifically intended in the image by Bellini himself. However it does seem within the 'poetry' of Bellini's composition that the background is intended to give glory to the Godhead and not to be interpreted primarily as a landscape but as creation lifted into the divine narrative.

⁷² *Bellini and the Art of Devotion* 51

§IV - Conclusion

Father

The Father in Bellini's artwork poses a problem for an investigation concerning the human-divine paradox in representation because, as was mentioned in the conclusion to the Crivelli piece, there should be no representation of the Father at all. The problem with this painting is that the image of the Father, regardless of how well presented, is inconsistent with the doctrines of the Church. However, in attempting to overcome this problem, Bellini adequately maintains both the human and the divine in the image when representing the Father. By imagining the Father as a partially revealed human there is enough mystery to maintain doctrine. This is compounded by having him appear through the clouds which give the Father a sense of divinity. The seemingly human form of the Father can be justified through metaphors of humanity being created *imago dei* and the few verses in the Old Testament which describe parts of the Father in terms of human anatomy. However, these ideas are complimented by divine symbolism so that the human appearance of father does not remain prominent and God the Father is presented clearly. Even the clothes and hair have symbolism attached to them such that they do not display human qualities such as age but the qualities of God e.g. wisdom and power. However, the choice of Bellini to give the Father a small aureole rather than a halo is contrary to what has already been said. By removing the halo the appearance of the Father seems much more like a normal human. With the addition of the aureole it might be rectified but the aura is so limited the Father still appears normal. The more stylised aureole of other artists, such as Crivelli, offers a more defined expression of divinity.

Regarding the relationship that the Father has with the Son and the scene itself the free motion of the arms presents us with a physical acknowledgement of the future situation for Christ. However, the face betrays a more stoic attitude. This contrast is appropriate for the Father because there is an expression, a human quality, yet that expression is suitably divine. It would not be appropriate if the Father was simply devoid of expression entirely. Furthermore, the geometry of the arms is such that one is slightly higher than the other. Again these small imperfections help maintain the right balance within the human-divine paradox. The arms have another interesting quality when portraying the Father in that they signify the death that Jesus is to endure later in his life. This too is appropriate since if anyone is to prophecy the death of Christ it should be the Father who knows the future. However, a question remains concerning what the Father is indicating through this position: Is it a foretelling of suffering or of divine plan? It seems this is suitably ambiguous in the image which allows for the two to be concurrent ideas in the composition of the Father. This in turn allows the Father to keep fatherly intentions towards his Son while remaining the distant God of the Renaissance.

Bellini has in his treatment of the Father produced an image which helps the viewer to see the Fatherly side of God the Father while maintaining the elements of the almighty and transcendent First Person of the Trinity. As regards the human-divine paradox in the Father the bias is slightly towards the divine. This is the best representation because the Father ought to be hidden and revealed through the Son yet even when revealed the mystery is more significant than the humanity.

Son

Unlike the Father, the Son is a much easier topic to discuss. The human-divine paradox is a natural theme when thinking about the Son. Bellini has attempted with some success to maintain these two contrasting ideas when painting the Son however his success is debatable. As far as the purely physical attributes are concerned the Son has a noticeable weight and posture which can only be described as human however there is a lightness and gracefulness which is unnatural for any human figure. As has already been said, the closest resemblance this type of artistry has is with the ancient Roman gods and goddesses who were effectively humans with special powers with all the flaws and inconsistencies that are part of humanity. It is hard to imagine from Bellini's painting that Jesus is anything more than the Roman deities except that there are hints concerning his perfection and otherworldliness. The distinction he has from the other human figures in the picture like the skin differences between Jesus and John or the perfection of appearance between the women/angels and Jesus. Furthermore, the fact Jesus narrates his own scene and the small aureole around his head which mimics the Fathers rather than a halo as the other figures have causes Jesus to appear distinct. It is clear that Bellini has tried in his composition of Christ to make him look as divine as possible while not losing the humanity of Jesus incarnation.

Outside the physical attributes of Christ there are two other important features. The first is the line going through the tomb and cross which reminds the viewer of Christ's mission. This shows the future lurking behind Christ which confirms his divinity and yet there is an element of the human in this as well. The expression of Jesus with his arms folded is one of submission and ultimately unknowing about his future. Bellini

subtly presents a picture of the self limitation of Christ. Divine without divinity only perceived as divine through revelation of divinity. This is an accurate picture of the bible story as well, where Christ does as he is commanded and then he is revealed rather than Christ revealing himself to the world. This leads to the second point which centres on the arms of Christ in a position of submission. The issue here is whether Christ is submitting to the Father's will without knowledge of the future or if Bellini allows Jesus some awareness and so gives him a typological pose with arms folded in the funerary style. In this case it seems to be appropriate to leave this to personal interpretation. Christ's life is understood in terms of self limitation and so there is no knowledge of the future except through the relationship which Jesus has through the Father. In this way it is possible that Jesus knows what is to happen to him. Yet the importance of this is in fact the question itself. Bellini chooses in this picture to create through symbolism and suffering a question which is in fact already containing the truth and answer e.g. if Christ is God and Man at the same time can he know the future? The answer is not really important but the didactic role played by the question is important because the mystery of the human-divine paradox is already implicit in Bellini's construction. In this way Bellini succeeds to present Christ within the paradox of divine and human. However, it is not a complete success because much of the symbolism is not necessarily accessible to the viewer.

Holy Spirit

The Holy Spirit within this picture is more mysterious than the Father because the form of the dove does not allow there to be expression or an easy connection with humanity. The dove metaphor is appropriate for the Holy Spirit but it does make one

consider why Bellini could not have done something similar with the Father like the symbolic hands of Verrocchio's *Baptism of Christ* (1476) (Fig. 11). The Holy Spirit in this form is seen and yet hidden. However, its action does not reveal much concerning its characteristics. This is fairly typical of all periods of art and theology concerning the Holy Spirit. This dove is given a certain importance by acting as a convergence point between the two images and between heaven and earth. Its prominence in the image helps the viewer to interpret the dove as an important factor within the picture. The anatomical draughtsmanship of the bird reminds the viewer of the realism of the event while the aureole maintains the holiness of the symbol. It is hard to distinguish whether this is an effective interpretation of the human-divine paradox because the human is so ambiguous and the divine so clearly stated. However, where the dove is very obviously symbolic Bellini has attempted to make it more natural and with some success.

Others

Within this picture the others are quite an important feature in discussing the Trinity particularly in relation to Christ. Certainly John the Baptist is someone who highlights the mission of Christ and his importance by giving Jesus focus in the picture. In this way the divine person of Christ is acknowledged. This is further emphasized by the difference in appearance between Christ and the only other male human in the picture through skin, grace, appearance, etc. Conversely this comparison does not only make Jesus look more divine but less human as well. John in this way helps Jesus to balance the human appearance with divine attributes.

The three women on the other hand are a more complex issue. If they were simply women then they would fulfil the same role as John in emphasising the divine. However, since they are normally angels and not simply women they make the picture look more realistic than extraordinary. With this detail there is an emphasis on the human yet this is to an extent overcome by the distance which Jesus has with the women. In some images the angels/women stand by and hold Jesus clothes. In Bellini's composition they are put at a distance and act as observers pointing out the importance of the person being baptised. Another point is the lack of awareness of the Father or of the dove which is important because it appears as if the participants of the scene are not able to see the Father in the same way that we as the viewers can. This helps to keep an element of the hidden-ness of the Father. Overall the others in the picture help to maintain the doctrine of the human-divine paradox.

Background

Most of the symbols in the background contribute to the idea of the human-divine paradox. The cross John holds and the tomb on the right reminds the viewer of the suffering that Christ is to endure but also his divine mission to restore Man to God and to destroy the power of death. The cities remind us of war and everyday life while at the same time through the perfection of the buildings presenting peace and the heavenly city. The palm tree shows the concept of victory in death and eternal life in the losing of life which are some of the most incredible paradoxes within the life of Jesus. The landscape itself while presenting a realistic scene is not quite real enough and has a perfect element to it which causes there to be a contradiction in the background between history and symbolism. Each of these ideas maintain this ideal

Bellini has created where every thing looks realistic but is always pointing to something more than itself.

Trinity

Trinity within this picture as a theological entity is quite cohesive. The three persons are well presented yet they are three separate individuals. There is a need within this picture for a more defined unity within Trinity. Admittedly the Father does reflect the mission of the Son and the three beings share a common light in the aureole that surround each. However, this is not enough to adequately show the unity of the three. Furthermore the image creates other inconsistencies. There is a question concerning the relative positions of the figures. Does Bellini portray Jesus subordinated to the Dove and both to the Father in hierarchy? It does not seem that this is what Bellini intended. His emphasis is clearly not on power differences between the three figures of the Trinity but the arrangement is more centred on the delineation between heaven and earth. The Father is in heaven, the dove is between heaven and earth, and the son is on Earth. However it could be construed that there is a processional idea in this image but this might be a misreading of the image.

Human-Divine Paradox

Overall the main impetus behind this image is the attempt by Bellini to create a realistic scene. His inclusion of background towns and cities, mountains, and plants helps provide this. The use of women rather than angels keep the distinction clear between heaven and earth. That Christ and John are very human in appearance and position suggest clearly the realism of the situation. Then there are symbols which expand the narrative but still remain plausible: the cross and tomb; the symbolism of

the plants and aspects of Christ's appearance. In making the extraordinary realistic Bellini gives the Father a human form, the Son muscles and human expressions, the Holy Spirit is a dove with accurate anatomical precision in drawing. Yet to all these things he gives a sense of divinity. The three members of the Trinity have aureole, the Father is only half revealed and has limited expression, all people in the picture are wearing halos, there are elements of foretelling in the image, the landscape is too perfect, and each symbol has another more divine meaning. Bellini manages to succeed in trying to create an image which takes into account the limitations of the human-divine paradox. Despite this there are inconsistencies and his Trinity is more individualistic than united.

Conclusion

Concluding Introduction

In two images of the late renaissance it is important to note the number of factors which have an impact on the discussion of the human-divine paradox. It must be remembered that from the inception of this project there was never a desire to discuss the validity of the Trinity in art but to accept the reality of this phenomena. In doing this the aim was to discuss the how far the artwork managed to maintain orthodoxy. The human-divine paradox was used as the context for a defined analysis. To increase the scientific nature of the discourse two images were chosen to be scrutinised so that there might be a frame of reference for the umbrella discussion. Each artwork was considered with reference to the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, Others, and Environment in each category of the Suffering and Signification. The resulting conclusions were reunited and discussed as to how far their use has contributed to this paradox. At the close of this thesis a suitable comparison of the two images in contradistinction is needed to examine the wealth of techniques employed and consolidate the issues which artists faced on the eve of the 16th century.

Fathers

Both images have attempted to relay to the viewer a sense of the divine in the human representation of the Father. It might have been better for the artists to have chosen a more symbolic representation and yet in such images where, for example, hands have been used there is a substantial lack of significance. For both Crivelli and Bellini the images convey not only the physical form of the Father but the meaning of fatherhood. However, in humanising the Father their images suffer because the

theology of God the Father is compromised. In order to deal with this problem both arrive at similar but slightly different solutions: the partial revelation of the Father. It is in this regard that their ability to maintain theological orthodoxy is most easily measured. For Crivelli the emphasis is the divine and as a result he chooses to show the Father leaning through a portal in the fabric of the universe. This solves one problem but creates others since the coronation is already a symbolic world which could conceivably be heaven. The problem is the creation of a second heaven in where the Father lives. Bellini's emphasis is creating reality in the scene thus humanising the Father and as a result the divine attributes are made esoteric. However, each of them curtails these problems with other factors: Crivelli uses the obvious and contrasting absence of the Father from the pietá and Bellini creates a division between heaven and earth in the geometry of the composition.

Sons

Each artist has a slightly different perspective on the Son, which is partly attributable to the differing situations with which Christ is interacting. Both of them try to make Jesus as human as possible by using strong physical features. Crivelli takes this the furthest with his Christ of the pietá by depicting realistic wounds and contorting his abdomen. However, each painter also balances their Christ with divine emphasis. Bellini is the more accurate in this regard since Jesus is both human and divine in the same body. Crivelli's picture is much more artificial in its attempt to show both aspects in different parts of the image. Though, Crivelli does, through this method make each of the natures of Christ more tangible to the viewer. Each artist uses the Christ-narrator in their composition. Crivelli's version has more impact because within his picture there are numerous others who could have narrated instead. Yet

Bellini's is much more devotional because his Christ draws the viewer to himself. The coronation is slightly confusing in this regard because it is uncertain who the focus is on: Mary or Jesus. The Christ of the baptism is the most theologically accurate but the Crivelli Christ is more didactic.

Holy Spirits

Bellini's Holy Spirit is far more sophisticated than Crivelli's. It is not afraid of the reality of the biblical symbol and so captures the dove as realistically as possible and tries to maintain the divinity of the symbol by placing it on the barrier between heaven and earth. Conversely, Bellini causes the viewer to easily misinterpret the significance of the Holy Spirit by making it too small, displacing it from a traditional Trinitarian triangle formation, and by making it look absurdly inaccurate. Bellini's use of the aureole of natural light is a pleasing choice compared to Crivelli's more archaic aureole of straight lines. Furthermore, it acts as an appropriate medium for statements about the unity of the Trinity which Bellini is greatly lacking in his image.

Others

The Others in each picture impact the Trinity and the concept of the human-divine paradox much more than was expected at the inception of this project. In Crivelli's piece they help to teach the viewer the correct response to the activities of the Trinity; they act as contrast for the Father and Jesus' humanity; and they help create a subtext of suffering in the image. The other characters in Bellini's work do not have the same effect since the Venetian style gives each of them an unnatural perfection with only John the Baptist seeming even remotely normal. However, changing the angels to women is an important feature because it shows Bellini was trying to maintain

theological consistency. Both images would be much less significant if there were not the plurality of Others in each scene.

Environments

The backgrounds are an excellent point for discussion to help understand the individual style of each artist. Both are beautiful and intricate in different ways. Crivelli has well defined elaborate details everywhere and very obvious metaphorical objects. Bellini uses subtle tones on a grandiose landscape with less obvious but wonderfully crafted objects. Each creates an image which has great cohesiveness and their environments impact the discussion of the human-divine paradox. For Crivelli the background follows the life of Christ. So, the pietá has symbols which represent the life and death of Christ while the coronation focuses much more on the divine interpretations of Jesus existence. Bellini's symbols are much more complex. They are not employed for simply one side of the paradox but have interpretations that can be used for either as was seen with the palm tree. As with Crivelli's use of symbols mimicking the human-divine relationship in Christ, Bellini also mimics the human-divine in his symbols.

Trinity

Each artist has a different way of expressing the Trinity. Bellini's is much more theologically aware but this could be because the focus of the theology for the Crivelli piece is Mary and not the Trinity. The most striking difference is that Bellini makes an attempt at maintaining the unity of the Trinity through the use of aureoles whereas Crivelli does not. Crivelli does try through optical illusion to show the three members of the Trinity in perfect union with the crowning of Mary and yet this does not seem

to be enough to suggest a unity of substance (*ousia*). Both artists have made use of the familial resemblance between the Father and the Son though this is much easier to see in the Bellini piece. Both of them could be accused of subordinationism due to the relative positions the Trinity has in the images but this seems to be more concerned with maintaining a sense of movement from heaven than any power struggles. Both succeed remarkably well in producing an accurate version of the Trinity and both fail at the same points. Possibly Bellini is slightly better since his desire for Trinitarian unity far exceeds Crivelli.

Human-Divine Paradox

In having placed the focus of this piece of work on the human-divine paradox, the theological premises and ideologies that each artist has been engaging with when looking at Trinity can be seen. As was mentioned in the introduction these two pieces were picked specifically because of their similarities of shape, artistic ability, area, time period, style and yet they are incredibly different in their treatment of this subject. For example though there is a similarity of shape in the image and each division is used to help maintain the human-divine paradox each of them has done it differently and with remarkably contrasting results. Crivelli centres his on the natures of Christ and Bellini examines the division in the Trinity between heaven and Earth. Another significant difference is that Bellini has used a biblical scene and all of Crivelli's work here is extra-biblical, yet both have had to deal with the same issues regardless of setting. Obviously the key to thinking about the human-divine paradox in these pictures lies with the artist's treatment of Christ. However, as has been discussed, the Father and the Holy Spirit are part of that conversation and the Others and Environment affect the construction of these ideas when thinking about the

human-divine paradox. It has been seen that this concept of the human-divine acts as an excellent key for the interpretation of images that incorporate the Trinity. By doing this the wealth of symbolism and characterisations are released from the images. Furthermore, if there had been space it would have been worth noting how the images use of the human-divine paradox might affect present day theology.

Appendix I

Details from Crivelli, *Coronation and Pietà*, (1493).



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

Botticelli, *Birth of Venus*, (1486)



Fig. 3

Michelangelo, *Pietà* (St Peter's Rome, 1498-9)



Fig. 4

Fig. 5 Crivelli, *Annunciation*, (1486).



Fig. 6 Niccolo di Pietro's *Coronation with the Donor and his Family* (Grottaferrata, 1394).



Fig. 7 Christoforo Caselli da Parma's *Madonna with Hilary, Baptist, an the eternal choir of angels* (Parma, 1499)

Fig. 8 Crivelli in his *Pietà* (San Pietro di Muralto, 1488)



Fig. 9 Masaccio, *The Trinity*, (1427)

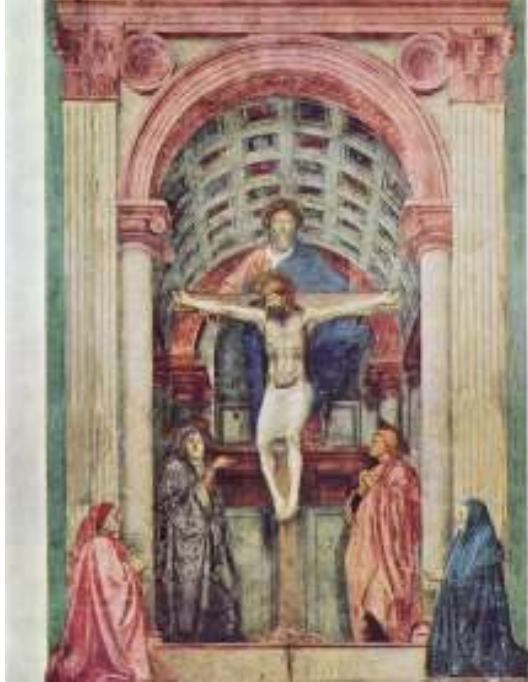


Fig. 10 The Turin Shroud



Fig. 11 Verrocchio, *Baptism of Christ*, (1476).



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